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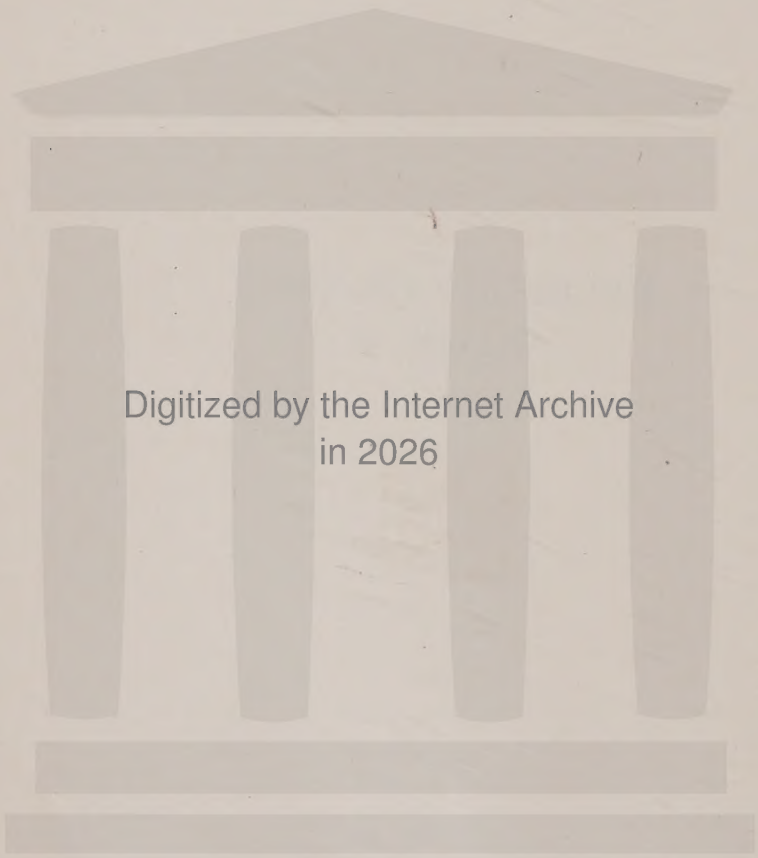
VOLUME II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RELIGIOUS DRAMAS

VOLUME II

SELECTED BY

THE COMMITTEE ON DRAMA

OF THE

FEDERAL COUNCIL OF THE

CHURCHES OF CHRIST IN AMERICA

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The world's next prophet will be a dramatist.

—Dean Inge

THE COMMITTEE ON DRAMA

OF THE

FEDERAL COUNCIL OF THE CHURCHES

OF CHRIST IN AMERICA

GEORGE REID ANDREWS, *Chairman*
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INTRODUCTION

We present the second volume of religious drama in the hope that it will be as cordially received by the interested public as was our first volume, *Religious Dramas, 1924;* and that it will serve in part to answer the ever-increasing demand for more and better religious plays. We hope, moreover, that a larger number of persons possessing dramatic and literary skill will be encouraged to employ their art in the writing of religious plays which will compare favorably with the best in secular productions.

In selecting the material contained in Volume II, the needs of the average church have been kept especially in mind. It has been no easy task to choose those plays which should be incorporated in the present collection—as those who have had similar experience can testify.

Three plays, *The Quest Divine* by Marshall N. Goold, *The Sword of the Samurai* by Tracy D. Mygatt, and *Two Sides of the Door* by Margaret Cropper, were discovered through a contest held by the Committee during 1925. Three others, *Whither Goest Thou?* by Carleton H. Currie, *At the Gate Beautiful* by Harry Silvernale Mason, and *Barabbas* by Dorothy Leamon, represent the character of work done by the students in the course on The Writing of Religious Drama, given by Esther Willard Bates in the 1925 Summer School of Religious Drama held by the Committee at Auburn, New York, in affiliation with Auburn Theological Seminary. The remaining four plays, *The Two Thieves* by Esther Willard Bates, *St. Claudia* by Marshall N. Goold, *The Alabaster Box* by Anna J. Harnwell and Isabelle J. Meaker, and *The Shepherds* by Marshall N. Goold, were selected from the large number of manuscripts submitted during the year to the Committee and from that smaller number of plays published since the first collection was made in 1924.

Though *St. Claudia* was issued by the Pilgrim Press in the early months of 1925, and *The Two Thieves* by the Walter H. Baker Company in December, 1925, we are offering a group of plays hitherto little known to the general public. *Whither Goest Thou?* and *At the Gate Beautiful* will be published by Samuel French simultaneously with the appearance of this volume.

We acknowledge our gratitude to the Pilgrim Press, the Walter H. Baker Company and Samuel French, for permission to reprint their publications above mentioned. To the authors of the plays we also express appreciation for their faithful assistance in preparing the manuscripts and proof for publication.

Religious Dramas II is offered as a library and director's copy. Separate editions of each play are available and should be secured for production purposes as they contain notes on staging, costuming, lighting and music not included in the anthology.

We are interested to know how successfully these plays lend themselves to production and should like, therefore, to receive, from time to time, programs, descriptive notes, suggestions and comments from those who test them in actual production.

THE COMMITTEE ON DRAMA
FEDERAL COUNCIL OF THE CHURCHES
OF CHRIST IN AMERICA.

April 1, 1926.

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THE QUEST DIVINE*

BY

MARSHALL N. GOOLD

There is, in the Bible, no authority for such a forgathering of the prophets as is here described; but it is entirely within the bounds of probability. All were prophets of the eighth century B.C. and outstanding figures of their time.

Amos, the herdsman of Tekoa, was essentially of the old dispensation, the very incarnation of the grim Mosaic Code. He reveals clearly in his book that he frequently visited Samaria, where Hosea made his home, and their common interests must have drawn them together.

Isaiah was the modernist, herald of the Social Gospel, prophet of the love of God and the brotherhood of man. He was a mere youth when Hosea was in active ministry, and, until the epoch-making event of King Uzziah's death, unawakened to the truth of God, but very curious and ardent about the deep things of religion. He was a citizen of Jerusalem, but it is quite in keeping with his character that, on occasion, he should have journeyed to Samaria to commune with the older prophet.

Hosea is revealed as the prophet in transition. He began as the disciple of Amos, and punishment was the key-word of his message, but, through his own harrowing experience of love that agonizes to redeem, he became the prophet of salvation and the forerunner of Jesus of Nazareth.

MARSHALL N. GOOLD.

* Awarded the prize in the Religious Drama Contest held by the Committee on Drama of the Federal Council of Churches in 1925. The separate edition of this play, published by The Century Co. for 25 cents, should always be secured for production.

CHARACTERS

HOSEA, AMOS, ISAIAH } Prophets
A Priest of Baal and Ashtoreth
JEMUEL, a citizen of Samaria
JEZREEL, Hosea's eldest son
A Merchant of fabrics
A Slave-Dealer
A Water-Seller
GOMER, Hosea's wife
ADAH, Gomer's friend

Samaritans, maidens of Ashtoreth, a slave, a blind beggar

THE QUEST DIVINE

Act One

Scene 1

Time: *A spring morning of the year 740 B.C., "the year that King Uzziah died."*

Scene: *The curtain rises on a corner of the market-place in Samaria.*

To the left front, a slave-dealer paces back and forth beside a daïs, on which a slave-woman is exposed for sale. She crouches disconsolately, with drooping head. A few Samaritans are strolling leisurely about the market. A blind beggar holds out a bowl for alms. To the rear, a Merchant *is sitting cross-legged in a booth of gorgeous fabrics.* Gomer, *the wife of the prophet* Hosea, *and her friend* Adah *are looking over his wares.*

Merchant:

These be wares to win a woman's heart . . .
The work of cunning craftsmen, all abroad
From the River to Philistia . . .
Veils of silk, and filmy gauze of Gaza,
But newly brought by camel-caravan . . .
Handle them . . . Are they not soft as dew? . . .

Adah (*Picking up a silken scarf*)

Gomer, how beautiful!

Gomer:

Yea; beautiful!

Merchant:

Is it not rich, and gentle to the touch?

Adah:

It would become thee well.

GOMER (*With a rueful smile*)

But ill become
A prophet's wife. Alas, that one be poor,
Yet ever longing for the beautiful!

SLAVE-DEALER:

Who will buy a slave for thirty shekels,
A Shulamite, fair as a summer dawn?

MERCHANT:

Fabrics to delight the hearts of all
Who love to deck themselves in rare apparel . . .
(GOMER *calls* ADAH'S *attention to a cloth of silver, and* ADAH *nods approvingly*)
The like hath not been seen since Solomon
Sent ships across the seas to distant isles,
To fetch him costly merchandise.
(JEMUEL *and a friend enter L, and are at once accosted by the* SLAVE-DEALER)

SLAVE-DEALER:

I have a goodly slave, a Shulamite,
Draw near, my lords, and feast your eyes on her.
(JEMUEL *and his friend pause.* GOMER *and* ADAH *turn and regard the slave curiously*)
Look on her . . . But thirty silver shekels!
And she is young, and sweet as myrrh.
She hath dove's eyes, and lips a thread of scarlet.
See! Is she not fair?

JEMUEL:

Aye; she is fair . . .
Too fair for those of humble circumstance.

SLAVE-DEALER:

But thirty silver shekels; she is thine.
(JEMUEL *slowly shakes his head*)

JEMUEL:

Such slaves are meet for lordlier men than we.

(*A* WATER-SELLER *has entered R, with a large gourd slung from his shoulder*)

WATER-SELLER (*In a singsong whine*)

Ho, every one that thirsteth, come and drink;
And God Almighty give me my reward! . . .

(AMOS *and* HOSEA *enter L.* AMOS *is a grim old man with a long white beard.* HOSEA *is a stern ascetic of some thirty-five years. They stand quietly in the midst of the bustle, gazing about them*)

Take water without money, without price.
'Tis freely offered, water cold and pure.
And God Almighty give me my reward. . . .

(JEMUEL *turns with a laugh, and accepts water in a brass cup, giving a small coin in return. The* WATER-SELLER *makes a deep obeisance*)

Prosperity attend on you, and peace.

SLAVE-DEALER:

I have a Shulamite, my lords, for sale.
Draw near, and look upon her. She is fair . . .
Would bring gladness and light to the heart of man.
A very moon of slaves!

(*The idlers are grouped variously about the slave daïs and the* MERCHANT'S *booth*)

MERCHANT:

Fabrics rich and rare!
Veils of silk and gauze, and cloth of silver,
Sheba's queen would not disdain to wear.

WATER-SELLER:

Ho, every one that thirsteth, come and drink.
'Tis freely offered, water cold and pure.

SLAVE-DEALER:

A slave, my lords?

(*The* MERCHANT *gets laboriously to his feet, and takes a cup of water, giving a small coin*)

WATER-SELLER:

God's blessing rest on you.
Ho, every one that thirsteth, come and drink.
And God Almighty give me my reward.

(*A* PRIEST *of the temple of Baal and Ashtoreth enters R. He is a majestic figure, richly robed in white, with a white skullcap, and he bears himself as a person of vast importance. He is accompanied by two of the maidens of Ashtoreth*)

SLAVE-DEALER:

But thirty silver shekels for a slave,
A Shulamite! Come. Who will buy a slave?

HOSEA (*Gravely, taking up the cries that are echoing about him*)

Who will buy a slave, where all are slaves?
O thralls to evil passions and desires,
Your God will surely give you your reward.

(*The frequenters of the market-place turn to listen to the prophet, some mockingly, others in obvious disquiet.* GOMER *and* ADAH *shrink into the background*)

PRIEST:

What! Hosea, as I live! Go, get thee hence;
Nor cast a shadow on our golden day.

(*The maidens laugh merrily*)

HOSEA (*Sternly*)

Thy golden days are numbered, insolent priest.
The evil time draws nigh, when God shall smite
This people down, and Baal avail them naught . . .
Dost hear? . . . Thy Baal will avail them naught.

(*He makes frenzied appeal to his fellow-citizens*)

O ye Samaritans, attend on me.
Are your ears so heavy that they cannot hear?
Are your eyes so blinded that they cannot see?
And great Assyria marcheth on his prey.

JEMUEL:

We shall have aid against Assyria.

HOSEA:

Nay. What is Israel but a silly dove
Before the fowler, fluttering here and there
For help; and yet . . . cannot escape the doom?
(*Angry mutterings from the crowd*)

A VOICE:

Peace, man, peace.
(HOSEA *becomes yet more vehement as he continues*)

HOSEA:

Peace, they cry; and, lo, there is no peace!
Will nothing stir you to give heed, e'en now
When one may hear the tramp of armèd hosts
That bring destruction and captivity?
Ah! Great and terrible, the day of God!

JEMUEL:

An oracle! Hark to the oracle!

MERCHANT:

Hosea brings the latest word of God.

JEMUEL:

Come, Israel, bend before the wrath of God.
Hosea warneth us that God is wroth.
(*Flippantly to the prophet*)
Is He not wroth? . . . Hast thou not ever said
That God is wroth?
(AMOS *raises horrified hands to the heavens*)

HOSEA:

Aye; truly, God is wroth;
And justly wroth, for greatly have ye sinned.
Israel, ye shall stumble by your guilt,
Who turn aside to Baal and Ashtoreth,
And wanton with the women of the shrines.
Did not ye give your soothfast word to God?
Did not ye plight your troth to the Most High?
But wine and new wine have ta'en away your brains;
And ye have played the harlot from your God.

(*The people have crowded near. The* PRIEST *of Baal and Ashtoreth stands by with a contemptuous smile on his lips.* HOSEA *flings out his arms excitedly, as though to force a way through, and, coming forward, speaks directly to the audience, as to the frequenters of the market-place at large, his voice booming out, grim and unfaltering as the tramp of the northern hosts*)

Hear then the word of Jehovah, sons of Israel.
Jehovah hath a bitter quarrel
With the inhabitants of the land;
For there is no troth, nor leal love,
Nor knowledge of the Most High God among you.
A people in decay!
Perjury, murder, theft, adultery,
They break out; and blood strikes on blood.

PRIEST (*Raising his hands in mock horror*)

A dreadful state of things, if it be true!
Oh, shame upon you, vile Samaritans!
(*Again the maidens laugh merrily*)

JEMUEL:

And yet, methinks, we have heard it all of yore,
And care not greatly for the oft-told tale.

HOSEA:

Shame! . . . Verily, saith the Lord of Hosts,
They shall be put to shame.
Upon them will I pour out wrath like water;
And the pride of Israel shall be humbled to her face.
(*Two or three whisper excitedly together. A woman sinks on her knees with despairing gesture, and covers her head with her arms*)

PRIEST:

Hosea, wouldst thou strike our souls to fear?
Behold what thine immoderate words have wrought . . .
But what a faith! And what a God to serve!

HOSEA:

Yea; get ye to your knees, O Israel.
Go; gird yourselves with sackcloth, and lament;
For terror yet shall visit all this land.
(*The penitent rises, and goes off with bowed head*)

PRIEST:

Nay; calm thyself. There is naught to make afraid.

AMOS (*Turning upon him, thunderously*)

Doth a lion roar in the jungle, and have no prey?

PRIEST:

Why! Here is ancient Amos riseth anew
To vex the land. It passeth sufferance.
Another raven croaking of evil hap!
It is a pestilence hath broken out.
(*He laughs*)

AMOS:

As the shepherd saveth from the lion's mouth
Two shin-bones and a bit of an ear,
So much of Israel shall be saved.
Wilt thou then laugh? Wilt thou sustain thy mirth?

PRIEST (*Interrupting*)

Will ye give heed to them, ye sons of Israel,
These prophets of a God of fear and wrath,
These harbingers of dolesome things? . . . Hearken:
Baal giveth increase of your flocks,
Ashtoreth giveth joy, Whom will ye serve?

VOICES:

Ashtoreth . . .
Baal and Ashtoreth.

A VOICE:

Jehovah.

VOICES:

Baal and Ashtoreth.

HOSEA (*With hopeless irony*)

Alas, my people! Poor idolaters!
Of a bit of wood they ask for counsel.
Yea; they make a smelting of silver,
Idols after their own model,
Smith's work, all of it;
And such things they worship!
For such things they forsake the living God!

PRIEST:

Beware how thou blasphemest the Baalim.

HOSEA:

God, Most High, is judge of all the world.
What are your Baalim but stocks and stones?

AMOS:

O Lord of Hosts, how long? How long?

MERCHANT:

We bring burnt offerings and sacrifice.

HOSEA:

Yet never offer that the Lord desires,
A broken spirit and a contrite heart.

JEMUEL (*In some misgiving*)

We keep the Sabbath and the festivals.

AMOS (*Passionately*)

I hate, I despise your festivals, saith the Lord.
Take away from me the noise of thy songs.
I will not hear the music of thy viols.
But let justice run down like waters,
And righteousness like a perennial stream.

(*Renewed murmurings from the crowd.* GOMER *steals up to* HOSEA)

GOMER:

Dear my lord, bring not their wrath on thee.
Behold, we are already outcast now.
Rouse them no more.

HOSEA (*Sternly*)

Gomer, what dost thou here,
Lifting thy voice within the market-place?
A woman's place, methinks, is in the home.

GOMER:

But canst thou not . . .

(HOSEA, *obsessed of his God-given mission, interrupts, inexorably pointing to the exit*)

HOSEA:

No more. Go; get thee hence,
Nor dare intrude upon the work of God.

(GOMER *departs with* ADAH, *looking back sorrowfully as she goes. Camel-bells are heard without.* ISAIAH *enters, a mere youth in his early twenties. He raises a hand in greeting as he passes* GOMER, *and takes his place among the listeners*)

AMOS:

And have ye not been warned, time and again?
I took away your bread;
Yet ye did not return to me, saith Jehovah.

PRIEST (*Mockingly*)

He took away your bread, O Ephraim.
Is 't not sufficient reason to return!

(*But* AMOS *pays no heed*)

AMOS:

I withheld the winter rain;
I smote you with blasting and mildew;
Yet ye did not return to me, saith Jehovah.

PRIEST:

Verily, a God of winsome ways!

AMOS:

I sent among you a pestilence;
I slew with the sword your youths;
Yet ye did not return to me, saith Jehovah.

PRIEST:

What a faith! And what a God to serve!

(*He flings out his hands in disgust, and turns away*)

AMOS:

Therefore, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel.

(*The Samaritans, taking their cue from the* PRIEST, *depart one by one L and R, with various expressions of impatience. Even the blind beggar takes himself off to seek a more remunerative stand*)

HOSEA (*Pursuing the people with warning, as they go*)

Woe to them that have strayed from me!
Woe to them that have rebelled against me!
I will be the scourge of Israel, saith the Lord.

(JEMUEL *is the last to go, and he goes gravely, apparently in deep thought.* AMOS *and* HOSEA *are left without a listener, save* ISAIAH. *The voice of the* SLAVE-DEALER *is heard again*)

SLAVE-DEALER:

But thirty shekels for the Shulamite.
Will no one buy a slave that's passing fair?

(HOSEA *sadly shakes his head over the whole sorry business, and, turning, sees* ISAIAH. *He raises his hand in greeting*)

HOSEA:

Peace unto thee, Isaiah. Why! 'Tis good
To find thee here again.

ISAIAH:

And peace to thee. . .

(*They embrace*)

If one may speak peace to thy stormy soul.

HOSEA:

What meanest thou?

ISAIAH:

Good master, here am I
But now arrived from Zion, seeking thee;
Yet knew I'd find thee in the market-place,

Scourging a perverse people with thy tongue.
And here, indeed, thou art. Are they so evil
There is no surcease? But . . . peace to thee.
Methinks thy words belie thy gentleness,
And there is little heart behind the scourge.
(AMOS *regards the newcomer with some distaste*)

HOSEA:

Hush thee! My words were given me by God.
Thy tongue's too glib, thy heart too light by far.
I would thou wert more grave . . . Yet art thou young
And dear to me.
(*He looks searchingly into* ISAIAH'S *face*)
Aye; there's that in thee
That reassureth me of years to come,
And yet will kindle light, to pale the stars.
Verily, thou art not far from God . . .
I bid thee welcome . . . and well met this day
When Amos here is in Samaria.
(ISAIAH, *though deeply skeptical of* AMOS'S *creed, is moved at the great name to drop on his knee with real reverence*)

ISAIAH:

Amos, the prophet!

AMOS:

Nay, young man; arise,
And stand upon thy feet.
No hireling prophet I, nor prophet's son,
But a mere herdsman, and dresser of sycamores.
(ISAIAH *slowly rises, still regarding the famous prophet with unconcealed awe*)
Jehovah took me from behind the flock.
Jehovah said to me: Go speak for me.

ISAIAH:

So didst thou speak, and all the land did quake.

AMOS:

Jehovah hath spoken: Who can but prophesy?

The lion hath roared: Who shall not be afraid?
Evil days are these . . . But who art thou?

HOSEA:

A youth who cometh from Jerusalem
To learn of this poor prophet of our God;
But, woe is me, I fear doth little learn.
(*With gentle raillery*)
A perverse youth, yet lacking not in grace.

ISAIAH:

Haply I interrupt your deep discourse.
Let me go hence, and come another time.

HOSEA:

Nay, nay, Isaiah. My soul was knit to thine
Since ever thou didst come to visit me;
And every sight of thee delighteth my heart.
May God increase thy faith . . .

SLAVE-DEALER (*Raising his voice*)

A slave, my lords?
A Shulamite, the fairest of her kind!

ISAIAH:

May God increase the love of man to man.
(*He gazes sadly over at the slave daïs*)
Faith is good. But why not talk of love,
When all a stricken land longeth for love?
I fain would see all slaves loosed from their bonds.
I fain would see the slaves redeemed, that lie
Beneath Hosea's scourge . . .

AMOS (*Irritably*)

They hug their bonds.
'Tis God wieldeth the scourge . . .

HOSEA (*Pacifically*)

Yea, verily;
'Tis God wieldeth the scourge. But come, good friends;
A cup of milk or wine beneath my roof,
And we shall have communion, each with each.
(*Slowly they turn away*)

SLAVE-DEALER (*Calling after them*)
But thirty silver shekels for a slave . . .
(*He makes a gesture of hopelessness*)
And none desireth to redeem a slave!
(ISAIAH *alone looks back as . . . the* CURTAIN *falls*)

Scene 2

TIME: *Following immediately upon Scene 1.*

SCENE: *A room in* HOSEA'S *poverty-stricken home. Doors L and rear. There is neither table nor chair. On the floor, a couple of eastern diwans, which are mere draped mattresses.* GOMER *moves about, busying herself from time to time with a distaff. She is gloomy and restless, and reveals a heart at war with itself.* ADAH, *from a diwan, watches her uneasily.*

ADAH:
Thou art not like the Gomer once I knew.
Thou art so sad. What hath come over thee?

GOMER:
I am aweary of the life we lead.
Canst thou not understand its joylessness,
The dole that lays chill hand upon the heart,
When thou hast seen, and thou thyself hast heard?
We are as Ishmæl, outcast from our kind,
Driven forth into a very wilderness,
And every hand against us . . .

ADAH (*Holding out her hands*)
Here be two
That fain would help, if thou hast need of help.

GOMER:
Yea; thou art good, and passing dear to me.
And I . . . God knoweth I have need of thee.
Yet . . . Adah, thou hast seen and heard my lord
Denounce the people in the market-place,

Scourge them with bitterness, brand them with shame,
Threaten them with the lowering wrath of God.
My erstwhile friends! And they have mocked at him,
And shrunk from me. How could they otherwise?
It is a madness that hath seized on him.
He thinketh nothing but the wrath of God;
He speaketh nothing but the wrath of God;
Morning, and noon, and night, the wrath of God.

ADAH:

Alas! There's much seemeth to merit it.

GOMER:

Yet is there much that might rejoice the heart,
Did he not banish it out of our life:
Sunlight and understanding, laughter, love . . .
Gracious things: he will have none of them.
And naught remaineth but the wrath of God,
Ever the wrath of God . . . Is God like that?
Tell me. Thinkest thou God is like that?

ADAH:

I do not know. It is too hard for me . . .
'T is written: "Thy God is a jealous God."

GOMER:

'T is written: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God."
Thy jealous God! Adah, dost thou love God?

(ADAH *ponders a moment*)

ADAH:

I worship Him . . .

GOMER:

Worship! Ah yes . . . But love?
For "thou shalt love with all thy heart and soul
And strength and mind." How shall one love God
Who waiteth with penalties each little joy
That springeth in the wilderness of life?
I whisper prayers, and weep; but, in the end,
I know this jealous God will strike me down.

ADAH:

Nay, nay. I am not skilled in argument;
But trust in God. He doth restore the soul.
He leadeth us in ways of righteousness
For His name's sake.

GOMER:

Oh, what can one believe? . . .
Hosea conjureth up the dark o' the soul.
Hosea liveth but the wrath of God . . .
I have a dread. It stealeth athwart my heart,
Deepening from day to day. . . .

ADAH (*Uneasily*)

Dread of what?

GOMER:

'T is like some dim unhallowed spirit riseth
Between my lord and me; whispereth
Dark counsels that do fright my very soul;
Draweth between us some accursèd veil
To hold us apart.

ADAH (*In alarm*)

But this is sorcery.

GOMER:

I know not what it is; but am afraid
Of murk that falleth like untimely night . . .
I used to thrill at Hosea's coming.
The desert place was touched to living green;
And all my heart was lit, like a hearth of home,
With Vestal fire. I thought it deathless then. . . .
He looked on me. The bitter winds grew soft;
And stars came down to us out of the heavens.
But now . . . Gomer is as naught beside
The sin of Israel and the wrath of God. . . .
Ah me! Is love then such a fleeting thing,
Fleeting as afterglow from graying skies?

ADAH:

Hush, Gomer! Thou 'rt distraught. The mood shall pass.

GOMER:

Shall pass . . . but ever shall return again.
Is love forsworn, the emptiest mockery?
Its promise but a word from traitor lips?
And yet . . . I still can love. God pity me!
It maketh me afraid; I still can love.
I would to God my very heart were dead. . . .
Adah, must a woman slay her heart,
And wither in a future bare of love?

ADAH:

'T is oft our lot. God pity womankind!
But what art thou saying? . . . Thou hast love:
The troth-plight heart, home, little ones.

GOMER (*Wildly*)

Nay, Adah. Do not seek to cozen me.
Thou knowest, and thou art my dearest friend.
The shade hath passed between my lord and me.
Hearken: I thought my heart grown cold, and yet
My dreams enkindle flames that sear my heart.
Ashtoreth! Ashtoreth giveth joy!
Ashtoreth calleth me; and she is fair.

ADAH (*In horror*)

Ashtoreth! Art thou beside thyself?

GOMER:

'T is like enough. I know not what may be. . . .
One day will come a darkness on the soul,
A madness in the blood; and then . . . and then . . .
What sorrows wait on me? . . . Who knoweth?

ADAH:

'T is direst sin even to nurse such thoughts.
And she that sinneth thus . . . Ah, woe betide!
Thou shalt not seek the spring of Ashtoreth.
Thou shalt not sink thy fresh soul in the mire.
I cannot think it of thee . . . Look at me.

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Thou wouldst not foul thy life with loathliness!
Ah, Gomer, why art thou disquieted?
Nay; hope in God, for thou shalt yet praise Him.

GOMER (*Sullenly*)

I care not for the God Hosea serveth;
Yet all the while he serveth only Him.
A jealous, vengeful, carping God is He,
God who is the scourge of Israel . . .
Methinks the prophet groweth like his God.

ADAH:

Nay, nay. He loveth thee well.

GOMER:

I see it not.
Am shut from out his counsels, as a slave.
He waiteth on God, and hath no need of me.
Long, long ago, when the world and he were young,
I thought I saw God in the heart of him.
But God hath hardened with the weary years.
I cannot share his heart with such a God.
Ashtoreth giveth joy. . . .

ADAH:

Hush, Gomer! Thou dost fright me with such words.

GOMER (*Hysterically*)

Nay; but I will speak out of my distress.
I cannot away with this the life I live.
Was I not made to love, and to be loved?
Why should I linger, trailing broken wings,
As a bird is left, songless and forlorn . . .
I, who knew rapture, and mirth, and love, and life?
Shall I content me with sere heart, dead dream?
Oh, I am aweary of my loneliness,
Aweary of my heartache. The world is calling:
I sigh for all the beauty of the world.
As a leaf goeth before the wind, I go.

Is it so wrong to snatch some joy from life,
To drink the cup held to the lips,
To clutch at love, when love is passing sweet?

ADAH:

Such love is will-o'-the-wisp that leadeth to death.

(GOMER, *at last taking thought, is ashamed of her outburst*)

GOMER:

Nay, nay; 't was but a weakness. Heed me not.
My words are wild. I know not what I say.

ADAH:

O Gomer, dally not with evil dreams.
If ever thou hast prayed, pray now to God
To tear such folly from the heart of thee.

GOMER (*Bowing her head, and folding her hands*)

God that watchest, hearken to my cry.
Am but a woman, weak before my fate.
Am but a woman . . . Lord, give me thy strength . . .

(*After a considerable pause, she lifts her head*)

There, dear; I meant not thus to frighten thee.
Forget the fleeting, foolish words I spake.
'T was but a mood. I am myself again.

ADAH:

Now God be praised, who giveth light and peace.

(*She rises to go*)

GOMER (*With renewed disquiet*)

Nay; stay with me awhile. It frighteth me,
When I am left alone, to think and dream,
Amid dark shapes, and darker questionings,
Mysteries, brooding silences, and fears.
O, leave me not . . .

(*Her voice sinks to a whisper, as voices are heard without, and the door slowly opens*)

Leave me not alone . . .

(*Enter* HOSEA, *ushering in* AMOS *and* ISAIAH. *They acknowledge in kind the deep obeisance of* GOMER *and* ADAH)

AMOS:

Peace be upon this house.

ISAIAH:

Yea; and peace
On all that dwell therein.

GOMER:

Greeting, my lords.
May God, Most High, shed forth His light on you.

HOSEA:

Gomer, wilt serve a cup of milk or wine,
To quench our thirst?

(GOMER *bows*)

ADAH:

My lords, I crave your leave
To go my way. My home awaiteth my coming,
And now already I have stayed o'er long.

(*All bow ceremonially.* GOMER *and* ADAH *retire together by the rear door*)

AMOS (*To* ISAIAH)

As I have said, your doctrine liketh me not.
'T is tainted of a wasted modernism.

HOSEA (*Reproachfully*)

Never was greater need to uphold the faith,
And cling to the ancient landmarks of our sires.

(*They recline on the diwans,* HOSEA *and* AMOS *occupying one,* ISAIAH *the other*)

ISAIAH:

Then, how advance?

HOSEA:

There can be no advance
Upon the faith Jehovah hath revealed.
'T is stable as the everlasting hills.
We have the law . . .

AMOS (*Urgently*)

Yea, cleave unto the law;
And worship God through all thine earthly days.
So shalt thou prosper, and thy seed shall flourish.
Thou shalt be hidden from the scourge of tongues;
At famine and destruction thou shalt laugh.
Thou shalt come to the grave in a full age,
As a shock of corn is gathered in his season.

ISAIAH (*Vehemently*)

It is a selfish faith, a wicked faith.
Shall a man be only heedful of himself,
His own prosperity, his length of days?
Shall a God be only heedful of Himself,
His dignity, His glory, and His power?
Methinks thou wrongest God . . .

HOSEA:

Wrongest God!

AMOS (*Warningly*)

Take heed what thou dost say.

(*At this point* GOMER *enters, bearing on a woven tray three little bowls of milk. She stands patiently, looking from one prophet to another while* ISAIAH *speaks*)

ISAIAH (*Impetuously*)

'T is given me.
Look you: the children sobbing in your streets;
Old men and righteous begging for their bread.
See the unfortunate sold to slavery . . .
That woman in the open market-place;
The blind, the sick, the crippled left to die.
Mark how the poor are trodden underfoot,
And honest work hath no fair recompense.
Then ask thyself: Is there not here a task
Laid on the heart of him who loveth men?
Such ills are to be healed: this is my faith.
Away with thy maledictions and thy threats.
Never by terror shalt thou save a world.

Only in serving mankind man doth pray,
And a kindly heart is more than sacrifice.

(GOMER *silently passes out the small bowls, serving* ISAIAH *first*)

Gomer, I thank thee.

(AMOS *and* HOSEA, *preoccupied, merely nod.* GOMER *squats on a mat in the background, and listens*)

AMOS:

What shall it avail?
Israel hath transgressed the law of God
Above all measure, and beyond all hope.
The virgin of Israel is fallen, no more to rise.
She is forsaken: none shall raise her up.

ISAIAH:

Hath God no mercy?

AMOS:

Yea; that He may be feared;
If they would but repent and turn to Him . . .

ISAIAH:

How shall they turn to Him, that know Him not?

AMOS:

They have been granted opportunity
Times without number, and have let it pass.
Perverse are they: God shall not pity them.
A nation shall be raised over against them,
And they shall go into captivity.
Yea; God hath sworn it by His Holiness.

ISAIAH:

Then, hear me, Amos. I despise thy God.

AMOS:

Blasphemy!

(*He takes hold of his garment, as though to rend it*)

ISAIAH:

Nay; hearken unto me.
Thou art a shepherd. If a lamb should stray,
Wilt thou then wait for it to turn to thee?

Visit on it thine all-consuming wrath,
Terror heaped on terror, threat of death?
Hold thee aloof, and say: It repenteth not;
Therefore a lion shall devour its flesh?
Away with such a creed, and such a God!

GOMER (*Softly*)
Isaiah, thou 'rt a prophet.

HOSEA (*Scandalized*)
Gomer, hush!

ISAIAH (*With impassioned earnestness*)
Wilt thou not seek this wandering sheep of thine;
Lay it upon thy shoulder; bring it back? . . .
If God be good . . .

AMOS (*Contemptuously*)
But these be men . . . not sheep.

ISAIAH:
If God be good, then will He feed His flock,
Gather the lambs in His arms; and, if they stray,
Seek them and find them with a heart of love.
Love alone will rid the land of plague,
And poverty, and slavery, and all the ills
That gall the people. These are on my soul.
'T is time thy God did something. . . . For my part,
I looked to Judah's king to redeem the land.
I never raised mine eyes above the king.
Thou knowest, Hosea, how I worshiped him.
Uzziah is the kingliest soul on earth.
But now the king is stricken unto death.
What is to come? . . .
Thy God I do not know;
But, an He be the judge thou thinkest Him,
The scourge of Israel, He is no God
Worthy allegiance. Have done with Him.

AMOS (*With what he considers infinite patience*)
Of a truth, art but an airy perverse youth
Playing with dreams, haply the years may heal.

But God alone can send forth light and truth,
And He alone is king of all the earth.
Learn thou the law, and cleave to God's commands.
God's law is perfect, and persuades the heart.

ISAIAH:

Man's law is all awry: it sears the heart.
We needs must love, and ease the lot of man.
Thou sayest: They play the harlot. Win them back.
Thou sayest: They are enslaved. Then ransom them.
Of what avail to tell them they have sinned,
Are damned, and outcast from the light of God?
Haply they know it. Lend a helping hand.
I care not for thy creeds. But serve mankind:
Thus shalt thou serve whatever God there be.
Love is healing; love is boundless giving;
Love suffereth long, as God should suffer long.
Love hopeth all of men, believeth all.

GOMER:

If only love were God!

HOSEA:

Nay, Gomer; hush!

ISAIAH (*Startled*)

If only love were God . . . or God were love!

AMOS:

God is no doting woman. God is truth
And righteousness and justice. God is strong
To visit vengeance on the soul that sinneth.

ISAIAH:

If only God were love! . . . Perchance He is.
Gomer, I thank thee for this thought of Him.
I needs must ponder it . . . A God of love!

AMOS (*In a frenzy of righteous indignation*)

Thou shalt not thus make light of God on high.
God is a jealous God, above all gods,

Mighty and holy, greatly to be feared.
God is great: His breath shaketh the world.

ISAIAH:

Love is great, where might doth not avail.
Why, only God could e'er have thought on it.
If God were love! . . . 'T is the wild splendor of God!
I think that God *is* love.

GOMER:

Then might one pray,
And lift the heart on prayer to the throne of God.

AMOS (*Angrily*)

It is not for a woman to discuss
The weighty truth of God.

HOSEA (*To* GOMER)

Aye; hold thy peace.

ISAIAH (*Rising*)

If God were love! Perchance, here is the way
Out of our doubts and dim perplexities.
I go to ponder it. Hosea, fare thee well.
May peace abide on thee, and on thy house.
Gomer, I am beholden unto thee.
Farewell.

HOSEA:

God lift on thee His countenance,
And guide thee aright. Farewell.

ISAIAH:

If God were love!

(*Exit*)

AMOS (*Contemptuously*)

If God were love!

(HOSEA *gazes in a bewildered fashion from* AMOS *to* GOMER)

GOMER:

Ah me! If love were God!

CURTAIN

Act Two

TIME: *Some two months later.*

SCENE: *The same.*

HOSEA *is discovered, sitting on a mat in sackcloth and ashes, his head bowed: the picture of desolation. He speaks in a dull monotone.*

HOSEA:

Wherefore is light given to him that is in misery,
And life unto the bitter in soul,
Which long for death, and it cometh not,
And dig for it more than for hid treasures?
(*A long pause*)
God, wherefore hast Thou withdrawn thyself?
Lo, I have called: Thou wilt not answer me . . .
(*Enter* HOSEA'S *son,* JEZREEL, *a boy about ten years of age*)

JEZREEL:

Father.

HOSEA:

My son?

JEZREEL:

Will mother come to-day?

HOSEA:

To-day? . . . God only knoweth . . .

JEZREEL:

Ever thou sayest
She shall return; and still she cometh not.

HOSEA:

Aye; she hath traveled far from home and kin,
Into the wilderness . . . a strange, far country . . .
Farther, alas, than . . .
(*Bows his head again in despair*)

JEZREEL:

But she shall return? . . .
What hath befallen? . . . I am afraid. . . .

HOSEA (*Pulling himself together*)

Nay, nay. Come hither.

(JEZREEL *kneels beside him, and* HOSEA, *placing his hands on the boy's shoulders, searches his face*)

Jezreel, I lean on thee.
We must have courage, thou and I . . .
Her first-born child! . . . Thou hast thy mother's eyes,
More than thy mother's heart. . . . Faith, Jezreel!
We must have faith, though all the world go black . . .
Thou art my stay . . .

JEZREEL:

Father, what dost thou mean?
Thy words are all so strange. They trouble me . . .
And I am lonely when she is away.

HOSEA:

Lonely! . . . O God! . . . And yet we must have faith.
I, too, am . . . lonely.

(*He raises clenched fists on high in a frenzy of passion*)

Woe betide this land!
And woe betide the priests of Ashtoreth,
Who foul the soul, as death doth foul the flesh!
Oh, woe betide the priests of Ashtoreth!

JEZREEL:

Father!

(HOSEA *sinks back again, bravely trying to smile*)

HOSEA:

Nay, nay; take heart. All will be well.
Shadows have fallen athwart me. . . . Heed me not.
I know not what I say; but . . . God is good.

JEZREEL:

Can I do aught to comfort thee?

HOSEA:

Not now . . .
Only . . . if thou dost see this frail heart waver
From that high faith I owe unto my God,

My son, forget not thou hast heard me say
Out of the shadows: God is good. Now go;
And play awhile beside the little ones. . . .
Haply the day draws nigh she shall return.

(JEZREEL *goes, looking back fearfully over his shoulder from the door.* HOSEA, *after a space, continues bitterly*)

Lies! . . . Lies! . . . Accursèd lies! . . . and to my son!

(*Looks up wistfully, as one clutching at straws*)

Yet . . . why should she *not* return . . . if God be good?
Ah, broken heart of me! . . . If God be good!

(*He sinks again into his former despair*)

Oh, that I might have my request,
And God would grant me that for which I yearn!
What is mine end, I should prolong my life?

(*There is a knock upon the door, and* ISAIAH *enters*)

ISAIAH:

God's grace on thee, Hosea.

HOSEA:

And on thee.

ISAIAH:

And is it well? . . . Nay; what hath come to pass?
Sackcloth and ashes! What hath stricken thee?

(HOSEA *sadly shakes his head.* ISAIAH *sits down beside him, and together they remain in silence for an appreciable time, after the Oriental fashion*)

HOSEA:

'T is Gomer.

ISAIAH (*Softly*)

Dead?

HOSEA:

Dead unto God and me.

ISAIAH:

Gomer! . . . What meanest thou?

HOSEA:

Dead unto God . . .
And me . . . O God, that this should come to pass!
Gomer hath turned her glory into shame.

Gomer hath sold herself to Ashtoreth.
Gomer . . . Would God that I had died for her!

ISAIAH:

But . . . God forbid!

HOSEA (*Wildly*)

God! He is afar.
The heavens are dumb: He seemeth not to care.
The treasure of my heart is gone . . . ah me!
And with it goeth my heart. So am I left
Naught but the dark unfathomable void.
Where was God, that He should suffer it?
Where was God . . . Nay; but one must submit.
O God, forgive the wretched man I am,
For I am stricken . . . to sorrow and despair.
'T is but my sorrow and despair that speak.

ISAIAH:

Then let them speak. Thy God will understand,
Look down upon thy sorrow, pity thee.
Thy God is gentle to the stricken heart,
Full of compassion: He will understand.

HOSEA:

Ah! He must understand. . . . There is for me
No longer singing joy within these walls . . .
Home . . . Country . . . Faith . . . God, Most High,
How all my world doth seem to fall apart!
Unprofitable hath thy servant been,
Thus to betray his trust . . .

ISAIAH:

Thou wrongest thyself.

HOSEA:

What 's left to me? I cannot think aright.
Why did God trust that joyous soul to me,
That I should quench its joy? That radiant soul,
That I should let the sacred flame die out?
She was my friend, the gladness of my life,

My sacred torch to guide me on my way . . .
And given to Ashtoreth! . . . Corrupted! . . . Dead! . . .
She was more dear than light of sun or star.
She seemed more true than light of sun or star.
She was my benediction. Ever she brought
Courage. . . .

ISAIAH:

Verily, she hath not slain thy love.

(HOSEA *reveals the desperate conflict that is going on within his heart between his enduring love and longing for* GOMER *and his loyalty to an implacable God of judgment*)

HOSEA:

My love! . . . 'T is weakness where God calleth for strength.
I would that I were strong . . . to cast her forth
Forever from my heart. . . . And still I love . . .
And love is sin . . .

ISAIAH:

I would not call it sin.

HOSEA:

God doth call it sin. His law is plain;
Yet ever I must needs transgress the law.
It seemeth, the man that I should be is dead . . .
Dead! . . . slain by the wretched man I am.
What is to come? . . . I cannot help myself.
Love is too strong for me, human love
That recketh not of the stern demands of God.
Gomer! She was my dearest dream come true . . .
But, "Thou shalt have no other God," He said,
"No God before me" . . . Haply I loved too much.
Thinkest thou, Isaiah, God was wroth?

(ISAIAH *emphatically shakes his head*)

My dream is broken; what is there to do?
I cannot trample it beneath my feet.

ISAIAH:

Take it up, and dream it o'er again.

HOSEA:

But love! . . . Was it a sin just to love,
As I loved Gomer? She was flesh and blood;
A little one, graceful as a flower,
And winsome as a song. She used to sing,
Care-free and glad . . . But that was long ago.
She had a way of moving . . . How shall I say? . . .
She held herself as though she wore a crown.
But now . . . "Tear her from thy heart," saith God.
"Dally not with the accursèd thing" . . .
O God, that one so loved should be accursèd,
And to be merciful should be a sin! . . .
Hast seen the sunlight glint upon her hair,
And in her eyes? It once was in her heart . . .
And yet accursèd . . . Gomer! . . . worse than dead!
Nor heaven with all its stars can comfort me . . .
Thy rod and staff in the valley of the shadow? . . .
Ah me! What hideous lack is in my faith?

ISAIAH:

Or in thy God?

HOSEA:

Nay, speak no blasphemy.
God's will is good: it hath no bitterness.
'T is only man is weak, born of the dust.
He cannot see as through the eyes of God.
Aye, man is weak. . . . Isaiah, thou couldst not dream
The thing for which I long . . . a wicked thing . . .
A perverse thing . . .

ISAIAH (*Calmly*)

I might.

HOSEA:

'T is hideous weakness,
Vile, and craven in the sight of God;
And yet . . . I long for Gomer . . . to return!
(ISAIAH *nods contentedly*)
Gomer, who hath sinned! . . . I want her back.

I must have been at fault that she is gone.
She never would . . . I must have been at fault.
I think I would not chide her, if she came,
But, patient, strive to win her heart again.
Haply it might be given me to build
Anew upon the ruins of our life,
Restore the shattered fabric of a dream. . . .

ISAIAH:

Verily, thou art not far from God.
Thy very words: I give them back to thee.

HOSEA:

Ah . . . God? . . . God? . . . What doth He think of it?
Not far from God! . . . Isaiah, mock me not.
This is no prophet of the living God:
It is a madman, dwelling mid the tombs.

ISAIAH:

Nay; but I spake as of sincerity.
I'd fetch her back.

HOSEA:

Hither! . . . To the home! . . .
God would not suffer it . . . Yet, God forgive!
I've sought her over all the country-side,
If but to look on her, and found her not.
And yet again . . . If she be found! . . . Alas!
Isaiah, 't is the law that she must die.

ISAIAH:

'T were better she should live, and serve her God.

HOSEA (*Wildly*)

But God commanded us that such be stoned.

ISAIAH:

I wonder.

HOSEA:

Wonder! 'T is written in the law.

ISAIAH:

Perchance the law is wrong.

HOSEA:

What art thou saying?

ISAIAH:

Moses ordained that Gomer should be stoned.
Yet God might find her worthy to be saved . . .
Not only Gomer . . . countless multitudes
That blindly have transgressed the laws of God.
God is like that. . . . Hosea, thinkest thou
Thy human heart hath suffered over sin,
And never the heart of God? . . . Hearken to me:
I 've had a vision.

HOSEA (*Eagerly*)

Vision of Gomer?

ISAIAH:

Vision of God,
Yet such a vision as might win thee forth,
To seek for Gomer, find her, fetch her back.

HOSEA:

A vision of God, bidding me seek for Gomer,
Bring her home! . . . I cannot understand
What thou dost mean. A vision! God be praised!
Did not I say thou wert not far from God?

ISAIAH:

God called me, all unworthy though I be,
Revealed Himself to me, laid claim on me,
Grappled me, past unbinding, to Himself . . .
Nay, doubt me not: this vision was of God.

HOSEA:

Tell it me. I never had a vision.
The word of God is a fire within my bones,
But never hath He shown Himself to me.

ISAIAH:

Nevertheless, I think thy vision cometh;
And thou shalt find God in the heart of thee,
Where least thou hast expected to find God,
Even in thy love for Gomer.

HOSEA:

God! . . . For Gomer!

ISAIAH:

Yea, in that yearning love thou callest sin.

HOSEA:

I cannot understand. But tell me all.
Truly, I knew thou wert not far from God.

ISAIAH:

Far enough . . . yet God stooped down to me.
A very miracle! All the world is new,
As though a wilderness blossomed as the rose.
Gomer had part in it . . . Dost thou recall? . . .
Inclined my heart to a new thought of God.
"If only love were God," said she . . . Gomer.

HOSEA:

I know, I know; but . . . a new thought of God!
God is the same, yesterday, to-day, forever.

ISAIAH:

Aye; but our human understanding grows,
Enlarging with the growing light of day,
Till, haply, men shall see God as He is.

HOSEA:

Tell on. Thou givest hope . . . some hint of dawn,
That riseth with healing on a wounded soul.
Thy vision . . .

ISAIAH:

Followed on Uzziah's death.
Thou knowest how I looked unto the king
To put this sad world right . . . And he is dead!
Uzziah promised all the heart's desire.
He started well. He was a righteous king.
He held the fate of Judah in his hands.
He was my hero, worshipful o'er all,
Foresplendor of new life . . . And he is dead!
Hosea, thou knowest well how solid ground
Becometh quicksand, its promise all mirage.

HOSEA:

Alas!

ISAIAH:

Yet was I not left desolate.
For thus it was, when King Uzziah died,
I saw the Lord, high and lifted up
Upon a throne, His glory filling the temple!
Above it stood the seraphim,
And one cried to another, saying:
"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts:
The whole earth is full of His glory."
And then I knew . . .
All in the king I had adored was God,
God Himself, with healing on His wings,
The living God, outshining through the man.
Love never glowed in man, but 'twas of God.
I saw in him an image, wistful, marred,
Yet still an image of the God he served.
That ardor for mankind I loved in him,
The zeal to help and save his country . . . *God.*
"If only love were God," said Gomer . . . Why!
Hearken to me, I *know* that love is God.

HOSEA:

Ah! Love may come of God, or . . . Ashtoreth.

ISAIAH:

Call that not love that layeth waste the soul,
The selfish passion that profaneth love.
But love, that is sinned against and still prevaileth,
Love that beyond all evil seeketh good,
Such love more truly showeth the heart of God
Than Solomon in all his glory;
Such love is nearer to the heart of God
Than Saul slaying his thousands, or David
His tens of thousands. Here is the truth of God:
'Tis not in might and glory He doth come;
'Tis not in wrath and judgment He doth come;

He cometh in love, yearning toward the lost,
Love that would find the erring, bring them back . . .
Such love as thine for Gomer, Hosea.
Here is thy vision: *Such love is God.*

HOSEA:

Isaiah!

ISAIAH:

Uzziah's love for Judah, thine for Gomer,
Love that saveth, I tell thee, *it is God.*
If thou canst find love in a human soul,
Aye, perfect, self-forgetful human love,
That yearneth, agonizeth to redeem,
It is not merely Godlike; it is God.
The vision floodeth all my heart with light.
I see God coming to earth in human mold,
To seek and to redeem His erring ones,
Incarnate love, perfect, and pure, and holy,
Man, spending Himself to save a world;
Across the souls of my brothers I see Him come,
Out of despair, and darkness, and defeat,
And He shall see of the travail of His soul,
And shall be satisfied.

HOSEA (*In awe*)

What shall He do?

ISAIAH:

He shall come, to live the light and love,
Which God is, unto all the earth:
To open blind eyes, bind up the broken heart,
To proclaim liberty to the captives,
To comfort all that mourn.

HOSEA:

Verily, thy vision is of God.

ISAIAH:

Ah! but He must suffer over sin,
Just as the spirit of the God of love
Within thy heart doth suffer over Gomer.

Ever must love suffer, and God is love.
He shall be wounded for our transgressions,
He shall be bruised for our iniquities,
The chastisement of our peace shall be on Him,
And with His stripes we shall be healed.
But His banner of love shall be over men;
His living spirit shall take hold on men.
Canst thou not see? . . . Hosea, when men do learn
Allegiance to the God of love, and live
The love of God unto their fellow-men,
Sorrow and sinning shall be done away.

HOSEA:

I think I see. God, open thou mine eyes.
It is a vision strange, but passing fair.

ISAIAH:

'Tis a vision of the day of brotherhood,
When all shall know that they are kindred kind
And children of the selfsame God on high;
'Tis a vision of the day of peace on earth.
Nation 'gainst nation shall not lift up the sword,
Neither shall they learn war any more.
'Tis a vision of the day of righteousness
When every human heart shall turn to God.
Fear is no tie to bind the hearts of men,
But God will hold them with the bonds of love.
Thou shalt not say, "Repent, or be destroyed."
Tell them the truth. Speak to the hearts of them:
"Turn ye to God, for God hath come to you,
Seeking you, bringing a heart of love."
Start thou with Gomer. Take unto her God.

(HOSEA *springs to his feet*)

Do not distrust thy yearning over her.
Achieve her full redemption by thy love.
'Tis God Himself urgeth thee to go,
The God of love within the heart of thee.

HOSEA:

Isaiah, thou hast given me new hope,
New life, new vision of the living God.
And Gomer shall be found. 'Tis given me
She shall be found.

ISAIAH (*As they go out*)

God speed our quest!

CURTAIN

ACT THREE

TIME: *A day or two later.*

SCENE: *A corner of the market-place.*

The cloth-merchant sits cross-legged in his booth, and Samaritans move aimlessly about. The SLAVE-DEALER *is not in evidence; but a slave crouches on the daïs, with bowed head. It is* GOMER. *From time to time she speaks in a detached fashion, as if entirely unconscious of the life and movement about her, alone with God.*

GOMER:

O God, a fire is kindled in thy wrath,
Burning and burning, unto the lowest hell.

(*Enter the* PRIEST *of Baal and Ashtoreth. He is accompanied by dancing maidens, who weave their way in and out with slow rhythmic motion, their heads thrown back in ecstasy, their hair streaming unbound. The feature may be made as simple or elaborate as circumstances suggest*)

PRIEST:

Blow the trumpet for the new-moon feast:
And bring your sacrifices unto Baal,
Who giveth increase of your fields and flocks.

GOMER:

The snares of death have taken hold on me;
Sorrows of hell have compassed me about,
Black as the heart of storm, black as the night.

PRIEST:

Bring milk, and new-pressed wine, and fleecy sheep,
Pledge of your loyalty to Ashtoreth.
Come to the spring, and feast with Ashtoreth.

GOMER:

I bow beneath thy judgment, O my God,
Bitter as wormwood, sharp as a whetted sword.

PRIEST:

Hearken, ye Israelites: 'Tis the new moon.
Ashtoreth biddeth you welcome to the feast,
Our lady Ashtoreth, goddess of love.
Come dance within the halls of Ashtoreth.

GOMER:

Ashtoreth! Thrice-damnèd Ashtoreth!
I went as bird that hasteth to the snare,
And knoweth not that it is for her life. . . .
O God! My neck is broken 'neath the yoke.
It is a dream. It must be hideous dream.
And yet it will not pass.

PRIEST:

Ho, Israelites!
Come, bring your sacrifices to the spring.
So shall a blessing rest upon your flocks;
So shall your fields give corn and wine and oil.

(HOSEA *and* ISAIAH *enter together, as the* PRIEST *is speaking. Naturally, at sight of him,* HOSEA *is stung to righteous frenzy*)

HOSEA:

Now woe unto the priests of Ashtoreth!
Woe unto the blind leaders of the blind!
Ye have destroyed the little ones of God,
Ye, and your Ashtoreth . . .
'Twere better that ye never had been born.

PRIEST:

Peace, fool peace! . . . Nay, if thou must preach,
Go preach unto the slave that calleth on God.

(*The* PRIEST *leads away his maidens, and the Samaritans follow.* HOSEA *turns slowly to the daïs.* GOMER, *who has risen at the sound of his voice, impulsively holding out her arms in appeal, sinks back again, her head bowed on her breast*)

HOSEA:

Gomer! . . .

(*He stumbles toward her. The corner of the market-place is deserted by all the others, save the* MERCHANT *and* ISAIAH)

Gomer a slave! . . . But slave no more . . .
Ah, Gomer, look on me . . . Thou wilt return? . . .
I am thy suppliant. Say thou wilt return.

(*Slowly* GOMER *raises her eyes to his. She cannot believe her ears*)

GOMER:

Return! . . . Dear my lord, thou knowest not;
Thou canst not know, or wouldst not seek me thus.
My sin . . .

HOSEA:

'Tis done away.

GOMER:

Ah, no, 'tis dark,
And grievous, past abatement or excuse.
For such as I there is no hope of pardon.
Yet look upon my sorrow and my tears;
Grant me assurance that thou dost believe
My penitence . . . e'en though it be too late.

HOSEA:

It never is too late, if thou wilt come.
Thy home awaiteth thee, thy little ones . . .

(*The* MERCHANT *comes down stealthily from his booth, gazes fixedly a moment on* GOMER, *and hurries off*)

GOMER:

And . . . God?

HOSEA:

Is pitiful. God doth seek
The broken spirit and the contrite heart.
God sent me hither . . . biddeth thee to come;
And what am I . . .

GOMER (*Incredulously*)

Thy God is . . . pitiful?

HOSEA:

Aye, God is love, beyond our dreams of love.

GOMER (*Passionately clutching at the seemingly impossible*)

Ah God! If I might live, redeem myself
Before His eyes, have opportunity
To prove me less unworthy than I seem! . . .
The years will pass . . . Haply the passing years
Might bring forgiveness . . .

HOSEA:

But 't is all forgiven,
If thou wilt but return to me. Gomer,
I plead with thee; say me not nay.

GOMER:

Again . . .
Return! . . . Thou . . . pleadest . . . with me . . . to return!
Thou knowest what I am . . . yet sayest: Return!
Nay; drive me not away. Stoop down to me,
Thou who art my only light of life.
Let me be near; I will not trouble thee.
Let me be an hireling in thy home.
I will but serve, and wait, and worship. . . .

HOSEA:

Hush!
Thou shalt be all that thou hast ever been.
And never shall we speak of it again.

GOMER (*Ecstatically*)

Never! . . . O God!

HOSEA:

Nor think of it again.
'T was but an evil dream. We are awake,
And it is dawn, and all the world new-born.
Life shall be glad again, my singing joy . . .

(GOMER, *suddenly remembering her situation, covers her face*)

GOMER:

Alas! Hast thou forgot? . . . I am a slave.
Behold my bonds. . . .

HOSEA (*Dazedly*)

Thy bonds . . . ah, yes . . . a slave . . .
But thou art ransomed from the power of death;
What chains of earth can hold thee? Thou art mine;
Aye, though it take my home, my life, my all.

(*Shouting*)

Where is the merchant? . . . Hither! . . .

(*Enter the* SLAVE-DEALER)

SLAVE-DEALER:

What would my lord?

HOSEA:

I 've sought this woman, sorrowing, far and near.
Strike off these chains. She is my wedded wife.

SLAVE-DEALER:

Softly, my lord . . . My price . . . She hath a price.

HOSEA:

But I have told thee she is mine. . . . The price?
I 'll give thee fifteen shekels . . . all I have.
See, here it is.

(*The* SLAVE-DEALER *laughs him to scorn*)

Nay, thou canst not refuse.

SLAVE-DEALER:

But look on her. She is a comely slave.
Sweet is her voice, and fair her countenance.
A very rose of Sharon. Look on her.
Her neck is like a tower of ivory.
Thirty shekels would not buy the like.

HOSEA:

Alas!

(*He stands stupefied*)

SLAVE-DEALER:

And see, her hands, dripping with myrrh;
Her cheeks a bed of spices, as sweet flowers.
Give thirty shekels, and I lose my usance.

(ISAIAH *quietly closes up on the* SLAVE-DEALER)

HOSEA:

Nay, I have but fifteen . . . a little wine
And barley, stored against the winter-time.
Take all I have, and let her come to me.
By all Jehovah's laws, Gomer is mine.

SLAVE-DEALER:

A pretty tale! Nay, nay . . .

(ISAIAH *plucks him by the sleeve, and glances furtively about him*)

ISAIAH:

Hearken a moment.
Knowest thou the sort of slave thou hast in hand? . . .
His pretty tale is true. She is wed to him.
A word to them across the market-place;
She shall be stoned. Look to thy benefit.

SLAVE-DEALER:

Stoned! O God of Abram, hark to him!
My slave! . . . He saith she shall be stoned! . . . My slave!
Who will make good to me my well won coin?
Twenty silver shekels have I given
To pay her debt. She is my lawful slave.
And . . . stoned! Nay; God forbid! . . . Is this the law!
Stoned! I bought her, own her, paid for her . . .
Twenty shekels, goodly silver shekels . . .
And . . . stoned!

ISAIAH:

Then is thy filthy lucre fled.
It is the law. Canst thou escape the law?
Better take fifteen shekels; let her go.

(*The* SLAVE-DEALER *turns back to* HOSEA)

SLAVE-DEALER:

The law! . . . But fifteen shekels thou didst say . . .
It is a bloody law . . . a sinful law . . .
A robber law! . . . But fifteen shekels . . . wine . . .
And barley . . . aye, some barley . . .

HOSEA:

Thou shalt have all.
'T will be delivered thee. Here is the coin.

(*He hands over his purse, and the* SLAVE-DEALER *releases* GOMER, *who steps down, and is at once circled by the prophet's arm. The* SLAVE-DEALER, *pausing only to fling up a protesting hand to heaven, proceeds to count over the money. Enter the cloth-merchant, with* AMOS, JEMUEL, *a crowd following*)

MERCHANT:

There! Did not I tell thee it was Gomer,
Ashtoreth's slave?

AMOS:

What do I see?

(*Murmurings from the crowd:* "Gomer!" . . .
" 'T is she!" . . . "Ashtoreth's slave!")

MERCHANT:

Behold
Thy friend, who scourgeth Israel for sin,
And yet would take the sinner to his home.

AMOS:

Hosea, what is this that thou wouldst do?

(HOSEA *merely holds* GOMER *a little more closely to himself*)

ISAIAH (*With gentle irony*)

Amos, art thou so very angry, then,
That one should so repent and be redeemed?

(*The voice of the* PRIEST *is heard without*)

PRIEST:

Blow the trumpet for the new-moon feast.

ISAIAH:

'T was God who brought our fathers from the house
Of bondage; God . . . hast thou forgotten it? . . .
Who yearneth to redeem us from our sin.

(*Enter* PRIEST)

PRIEST:

Come to the spring . . .

(*He stops short, and at a glance takes in the situation*)

AMOS:

The wage of sin is death;
Thou shalt not make a mockery of God . . .
O Ichabod! Can this be Hosea? . . .
The woman must be driven without the gate,
And stoned. 'T is Moses hath commanded it.

(*Approving murmurs from the crowd*)

SLAVE-DEALER:

Aye, stone her!

MERCHANT:

Stone the woman who hath sinned.

PRIEST:

And stone the prophet who condoneth it.

ISAIAH:

'T is thou, foul priest! Thou'lt better hold thy peace.

(*The crowd menace* HOSEA. GOMER *breaks from him and confronts them*)

GOMER:

Nay, I alone have sinned. Do as ye will;
Thus shall my wickedness be blotted out.
But lay no hand upon the innocent.

HOSEA:

Gomer, hush!

(*The crowd murmur confusedly*)

SLAVE-DEALER:

Stone them!

HOSEA (*Raising his hand authoritatively*)

A moment's patience!
Ere ye slay me, give me leave to speak.

MERCHANT:

Shall he speak?

VOICES (*Confusedly*)

Nay, nay.
Yea, yea.

JEMUEL (*Assuming control of the situation*)

'T is something new
That Hosea should seek the erring one,
Redeem her, bring her back into his home.
'T is not, methinks, the prophet we have spurned.

SLAVE-DEALER (*Vindictively*)

Death to them both!

JEMUEL (*Sternly*)

Hold thou thy peace.

VOICES:

Silence!

JEMUEL:

By Aaron's beard, I do respect the man.
He hath a change of spirit. For my part,
I fain would hear what he may have to tell,
The why and wherefore of it. Let him speak.
What think ye?

MERCHANT:

Let him speak.

VOICES:

Say on.

AMOS:

Beware how thou dost falsify the truth
That God hath given thee . . .

JEMUEL (*To* AMOS)

We know thy truth,
And are aweary of thy truth.

VOICES:

Yea; peace!

MERCHANT:

'T is granted.

JEMUEL:

Hosea, thou hast our ears.

HOSEA:

I thank thee, Jemuel. Samaritans,
I have been wrong. I do confess my fault.
Yet let me make it plain. I have not erred
In thus redeeming Gomer. God Himself
Hath ordered it. Beyond a shade of doubt
God doth approve. Nay, but in this I erred;
I have belittled God, proclaiming Him
A God of wrath, relentless and austere,
Who cometh down in judgment on the land.
Be not deceived; God is a righteous God,
And, verily, cannot make light of sin.
Yet doth He come in mercy, strong to save;
And, lo! there is no Saviour like to Him.
For after all these years I have seen God,
And He hath shown to me a heart of love.

(*Approving murmurs from the crowd*)

AMOS:

Thou speakest blasphemy; degradest God.

GOMER:

'T is thou, old man, blasphemest.

ISAIAH:

God is love.
Love is the divinest thing, love
That endureth all, love that never faileth.
Shall mortal man reveal more love than God?

(GOMER, *moved by her solicitude over* HOSEA, *throws to the winds her natural diffidence*)

GOMER:

And here is love! Ye know, Samaritans:
Ye cannot help yourselves. . . . Within your hearts
Ye do commend this that my lord hath done,
In that he sought me out in deathless love,
In that he took me from the fearful pit
And from the miry clay . . . gave me new life.
Is this not Godlike? . . . Slay me, an ye will;
Yet heed the message love hath given me.

AMOS (*Cynically*)

Is Gomer, too, among the prophets?

GOMER:

Yea;
Sorrow hath oped mine eyes, and I do see.
What am I? . . . Gomer? . . . I am Israel!
I am all this sinful blundering earth,
Stricken, desolate, bound with chains.
Can Israel be redeemed with flaming sword?
Shall one scourge Israel back to wholesomeness?
I tell you, love alone shall break her bonds,
And lift her up, and give her back her soul.

JEMUEL:

Can this be Gomer?

ISAIAH:

God hath touched her lips.

GOMER:

Give no heed to Gomer. She is naught;
And, if so be she perish, she shall perish
Knowing something of the heart of God . . .

VOICES:

Nay!

JEMUEL:

She shall not perish.

VOICES:

Nay!

A Voice:

Long live Gomer!

(*The fickle crowd has quite evidently turned to sympathy with* Hosea *and* Gomer. *The* Priest *of Baal and Ashtoreth, thinks it best to make an unostentatious exit*)

Gomer:

But, O yet prophets of the living God,
Reveal the heart of God to Israel.

Amos:

Beware . . .

(*The crowd turn upon him threateningly*)

Jemuel:

Peace, man! . . . We would have more of this.
There 's something here, methinks, doth smack of truth,
Aye, stirreth the heart to new expectancy.
If this be Godlike, we would hear of Him.
If this be Godlike, one might cleave to God.
Hosea, give us this new oracle.

(*The people noisily acclaim* Jemuel, Hosea, *and* Gomer)

Merchant:

Peace! Let us hear what Hosea will say.

Voices:

Hosea!

Jemuel:

Tell us this thou hast of God
For Ephraim.

(Amos, *with a gesture of hopeless protest, stalks from the scene.* Hosea *comes forward, and speaks as to the frequenters of the market-place at large*)

Hosea:

Thus saith the Lord, thy God:
I taught Ephraim to go, taking them in mine arms,
But they knew not that I healed them.
I drew them with cords of a man,
With bands of love.

I will heal their backsliding;
I will love them freely . . .

VOICES:
Hosannah!

MERCHANT:
Peace, the while he speaketh.

VOICES:
Hush!

HOSEA:
I will be as the dew unto Israel.
I will ransom them from the power of the grave;
I will redeem them from death . . .

ISAIAH:
Amen to that, Hosea.

GOMER (*Softly*)
Amen.

JEMUEL (*Groping like a blind man, whose eyes are opened and dazed with excess of light*)
Amen.
O thou that sendest light and truth, Amen.

HOSEA (*In wistful appeal*)
Come and let us return unto the Lord,
For He hath torn, and He will heal us;
He hath smitten, and He will bind us up.
His going forth is sure as the morning,
And, beside Him, there is no Saviour.
Yea; thus saith God to them that are of fearful heart:
Be strong; nor ever be afraid.
(*He raises a hand in benediction*)
The eternal God of love is your refuge;
And underneath are the everlasting arms.

CURTAIN

THE TWO THIEVES *

BY

ESTHER WILLARD BATES

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CHARACTERS

First Thief

Second Thief

Heavenly Chorus (*Unseen*)

Harper (*Unseen*)

THE TWO THIEVES

The scene is a region lying somewhere between the worlds. Shadowy rocks and crags lift themselves out of the dusk, and unseen deep abysses cleave the ground, hidden by a heavy, illimitable fog. Far away a lost wind shrieks. It beats about in the darkness and fills the place with lonely foreboding. A crash of distant thunder echoes and reëchoes, and as it dies away, the crying of the wind persists—remote, mysterious. There is a sound of stumbling feet and heavy breathing. Then a pause and a bitter sigh.

The curtain rises as the First Thief *comes falteringly into sight, moving with difficulty, for the grave-clothes are still wrapped about him. He does not look up, but cries out as though speaking only to his own heart.*

First Thief: Lord, dost Thou remember Thy promise? That I should be with Thee to-day in paradise? Where am I? What am I? Hast Thou forgotten me? Lord, Lord, Thou saidst I I should be with Thee. If Thou hast come into Thy kingdom, remember me this day. For here I walk in darkness and alone. Or are there other dead about me? Lord, I am afraid! Take this terror from me. The agony of the cross was not like this. Let me not be alone! Let me not be alone! (*He looks about him in terror as the* Second Thief *approaches from the shadowy depths*) Hark! Who comes? One that is blind.

(*Wrapped in gray cerements, the other comes feeling his way along the rocky chasm*)

Second Thief: Who spoke?

First Thief: I.

Second Thief: And who art thou?

First Thief: I? I was a man, but now I walk a ghost.

SECOND THIEF: A blessed ghost?

FIRST THIEF: Unblest. And thou?

SECOND THIEF: Dead and worse than dead. For I am blind.

FIRST THIEF: Can the dead be blind?

SECOND THIEF: Aye. Had I been blind while yet I lived, I had not seen what I did see.

FIRST THIEF: And what was that?

SECOND THIEF: The veil of the Temple rent——

FIRST THIEF: Ah!

SECOND THIEF: Darkness at midday——

FIRST THIEF: And then?

SECOND THIEF: I looked on One who hung beside me, and saw a dove with folded wings; then I was blinded and I saw no more.

(*The* FIRST THIEF *moves over to him swiftly*)

FIRST THIEF: Let me see thy hands. (*The* SECOND THIEF *holds out to him two pierced and bloody hands. The* FIRST THIEF *places his own beside them*) Like mine. Like mine. So thou, too——

(*He looks at the other pitifully*)

SECOND THIEF: I? Your hands?

FIRST THIEF: Yea, mine are piercèd, too.

SECOND THIEF: Then—thou——

FIRST THIEF: Upon the other side my cross was lifted up. (*The* SECOND THIEF *laughs bitterly*) Not that sound—no, not that! It is bitter——

SECOND THIEF: My bitterness is yet within me.

FIRST THIEF: Forget.

SECOND THIEF: Forget? When mine agony is not yet gone from me?

FIRST THIEF: Is it not? (*He speaks pityingly*)

SECOND THIEF: Nay, even my spirit burns, remembering my long suffering, with none to give me ease. To Him they gave vinegar;

I strangled with my thirst. At His feet knelt those who loved Him; while all who passed reviled me.

FIRST THIEF: They reviled Him, too. But He said, "Father, forgive them."

SECOND THIEF: If He was the Son of God, why came He not down from the cross?

FIRST THIEF: Because He prayed, "Father, Thy will, not Mine, be done."

SECOND THIEF: I said unto Him, "If Thou be Christ, save Thyself and us." He hearkened not. He would not save me from mine own agony.

FIRST THIEF: Thou shouldst have heeded me.

SECOND THIEF: Wherefore?

FIRST THIEF: I bade thee fear God, seeing thou wast in the same condemnation.

SECOND THIEF: He trusted in God, but God delivered Him not.

FIRST THIEF: Nay, but God did!

SECOND THIEF: Not so! I heard Him cry, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"

FIRST THIEF: And immediately the hour of His release came, for I heard Him say, "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit."

(*The* SECOND THIEF *cowers and puts his hands up to his eyes, for the memory is unbearable*)

SECOND THIEF: And we were left, while there was darkness over all the land.

FIRST THIEF: I saw the bodies of the saints which slept arise, and I was healed.

SECOND THIEF: Not I! A fire danced in mine eyes, and I heard the centurion at my feet saying, "Truly this was the Son of God."

FIRST THIEF: I swooned—and thou?

SECOND THIEF: I went out in agony of the flesh, and now my spirit is in agony.

FIRST THIEF: Canst thou not think upon His promise?

SECOND THIEF: His promise?

FIRST THIEF: That we should be with Him to-day in paradise?

SECOND THIEF: He promised thee, not me.

FIRST THIEF: But we are twain, thieves and crucified.

SECOND THIEF: Thou didst believe on Him and on eternal life. I went out blinded by mine own unbelief.

FIRST THIEF (*Gently*) Believe now.

SECOND THIEF: He was an impostor. Were I back on Calvary, I would join me with the mockers. Where are we now? In paradise?

FIRST THIEF: If we go hence, we may find a highway and a way.

SECOND THIEF: I cannot see.

FIRST THIEF: I will lead thee till the mist clears from thine eyes.

SECOND THIEF: Whither?

FIRST THIEF: To find the way to paradise.

SECOND THIEF: They will turn me away.

FIRST THIEF: Come.

SECOND THIEF: No.

FIRST THIEF: Wherefore?

SECOND THIEF: I dare not. Great chasms yawn and dark abysses. I will stay here and wait till dawn.

FIRST THIEF: If the dawn comes.

SECOND THIEF: If? Tell me, is it always night here? Is it night and not my blindness?

FIRST THIEF: It is both.

SECOND THIEF: Why dost thou frighten me?

First Thief: So that thou wilt come with me.

(*The* Second Thief *makes a faltering step and draws back fearfully*)

Second Thief: I cannot feel the earth beneath my feet.

First Thief: Have faith!

(*The winds ebb away like a receding tide, and a silence follows*)

Second Thief: How still it is!

First Thief: Hark!

(*Remote as the farthest singing star there comes a slender thread of song across the void*)

Second Thief: I hear nothing.

First Thief: I thought I heard a far-off canticle as of celestial voices welcoming their Lord.

Second Thief: The crying wind, no more.

First Thief: Hark yet again!

(*Once more faintly, very faintly, the celestial choristers mingle their voices with the dying wind, and their song is the song of everlasting joy*)

Second Thief: Only the wind crying like a lost soul in a lonely land. Let be. We twain are lost forever. Winnowed out of the world like chaff. I was a thief, and so wast thou.

First Thief: I was. But now I must go to my Father. Come thou with me.

Second Thief: No! If I stir, the mountains will fall upon me. There are the waters as of wormwood. I am afraid of the very wrath of God. Tarry thou here by my side, for are not twain greater than one?

First Thief: I will cry upon the Lord, and He will hear us. My Lord and my God! (*He lifts up his head in entreaty, and from the Beautiful Gates there slips out a slender shaft of golden light and slides down upon the wind to the place between the worlds. It is no more than a taper's lonely beam that shines*

across the void, but it falls upon the uplifted face of the First Thief) Look!

Second Thief (*Dully*) Whither?

First Thief: Toward the light.

Second Thief: Light! Darkness incredible.

First Thief: A light unto our feet, O Lord.

(*Forgetting all for a moment but the slender golden rays of light, the* First Thief *starts toward it. The* Second Thief *tries angrily to clutch after him*)

Second Thief: Thinkest thou to leave me here alone?

First Thief: Come.

(*He moves little by little in the direction of the gleam, and as the* Second Thief *blindly tries to follow him, he goes astray and staggers*)

Second Thief: Accursedst! Thinkest thou to lead me into the pit?

First Thief: I see a shining path!

Second Thief: If thou betrayest me unto a second death——

First Thief: I am reaching out my hand to thee.

Second Thief: Where?

First Thief: This way——

Second Thief: Whither?

First Thief: If thou canst not see the light, hearken! Far away the angels are singing.

Second Thief: I hear a moaning sound, no more.

(*The* First Thief, *still gazing toward the lance-like shaft of light, is transfixed. The* Second Thief *clings to his rock hopelessly*)

First Thief: Shall I, then, go on alone?

(*He turns pityingly to his companion, and seeing him standing fearfully there, goes back, his hand outstretched*)

Second Thief: Nay! (*He finds the other's hand and thrusts it away. Flinging himself upon the* First Thief, *he takes him*

by the throat) I will strangle thee ere thou shalt leave me. We were two thieves on earth, and we shall be two thieves forever.

First Thief: Take thy hands from my throat.

Second Thief: Wilt thou remain?

First Thief: For fear of thee?

Second Thief: For very fear.

First Thief: Nay, then.

Second Thief: What? Once more?
(*He clutches the* First Thief *more violently*)

First Thief: Bruise not thy piercèd hands.

Second Thief: Thy hands are piercèd, too.

First Thief: So do I know how sore are thine own wounds.

Second Thief: Art thou not angry with me?
(*He drops his hands in wonderment*)

First Thief: Nay.

Second Thief: I would have hurled thee to the very depths.

First Thief: I know.

Second Thief: I swear that I will keep thee here.

First Thief: Thou canst not constrain me. I am free of thee. Thou art blind. Yet I stay of mine own free will.

Second Thief: Stay—willingly?

First Thief: Willingly.

Second Thief: Why?
(*And he whispers in his wonder*)

First Thief: Because I hung beside Him on the cross.

Second Thief: Wilt thou take my hand?

First Thief: Aye.

Second Thief: And stay?

First Thief: Aye, brother.

(*Far away in the star-swept regions there is a great cry of angels welcoming their King, and some of the starry fire*

drifts down upon a ribbon of wind and sprinkles its light upon the twain, but only one perceives it)

SECOND THIEF: You called me brother.

FIRST THIEF: Aye.

SECOND THIEF: Even though I would have thee tarry with me whom thou must hate?

FIRST THIEF: I hate thee not.

SECOND THIEF: Not me?

FIRST THIEF (*Very low*) I love thee, brother.

SECOND THIEF: How canst thou?

FIRST THIEF: Because I hung on Calvary.

SECOND THIEF: That word thou saidst, "brother." no man ever spoke to me before. Not until this hour did any man deny himself for me.

FIRST THIEF: Then come with me.

SECOND THIEF: No, no, we shall find a place more terrible than this. Mine eyes are darkened utterly, and my feet fail.

FIRST THIEF: Yet there is light somewhere.

SECOND THIEF: There is no light nor any sound of music.

FIRST THIEF: Yet there is both!

SECOND THIEF: Then am I deaf and blind. Hold me, brother.

FIRST THIEF: I will not forsake thee.

(*The Beautiful Gates open more widely so that a band of golden light floats down and shines full upon the face of the* FIRST THIEF. *He lifts up his eyes to its radiance. Across the distant skies ring the heavenly canticles, and little cadences of song, like dream melodies, eddy about the wind-swept silences. A quietness falls upon the men, and the* SECOND THIEF *bows his head brokenly over the pierced hands of his brother*)

SECOND THIEF: Dost thou still hear the song of the angels?

FIRST THIEF: I hear it now.

SECOND THIEF: Clearly? As heretofore?

FIRST THIEF: More clear.

SECOND THIEF: Brother, dost thou still see the light?

FIRST THIEF: Even now it shines.

SECOND THIEF: Does it shine near or far?

FIRST THIEF: Very far.

SECOND THIEF: But dimly?

FIRST THIEF: Nay, brighter than before.

SECOND THIEF: I am blind indeed. O Lord, my Lord, that ever I did mock thee.

FIRST THIEF: It deepens now in splendor. (*Now sweeps down upon the* FIRST THIEF *a full flood of celestial splendor, light upon light. He gazes radiantly into it, and the* SECOND THIEF, *his eyes closed, falters helplessly and stretches out his empty hands as if he would feel its warmth, yet cannot do so. Then he covers his face in his grief*) O glorious light! Look!

SECOND THIEF: Blind! Blind!

FIRST THIEF: More than light! Clouds of glory surging upward! Hosts of angels and in their midst—O my blessed Lord! I see Thee plain! Thou art this day in paradise!

(*He stretches up his hands heavenward. The* SECOND THIEF *falls upon his knees and clings to his brother's robe*)

SECOND THIEF: Light all about thee, and about me the dark. Leave me not alone.

(*The* FIRST THIEF *lays his hand tenderly upon his brother*)

FIRST THIEF: Master, thou seest? I cannot come, for my brother needs me here.

SECOND THIEF: Leave me not.

FIRST THIEF: Now Thou ascendest on high. Thou sittest at the right hand of God. The angels and archangels about Thee.

SECOND THIEF: Brother, thou dreamest. It is cold and dark, and the winds of all the worlds blow about us.

(*The* SECOND THIEF *reaches up and feels for his brother's hand and holds it close*)

FIRST THIEF: Master, I tarry here, for I have shared Thine agony. He who needeth me, him must I serve.

(*The* SECOND THIEF *listens to his brother in amazement, and the doubt upon his face gives way to awe*)

SECOND THIEF: Brother, dost thou really see thy Lord?

FIRST THIEF: My King and my God!

(*He gazes off into the living light*)

SECOND THIEF: I loose my hold upon thee. Thou shalt go whither the light leads. Even though I stay in the pit, I will not keep my brother from paradise. Go, while my strength is on me, go!

FIRST THIEF: And leave thee? Nay, I have made my choice.

SECOND THIEF: Go.

FIRST THIEF: Forsaking thee?

SECOND THIEF: Go now, ere I forget my love for thee.

FIRST THIEF: Thy love for me?

(*The* SECOND THIEF *bows his head so that his brother may not see his grief. The song of the angels comes more clearly through the air*)

SECOND THIEF: Hark!

FIRST THIEF: Hearest thou also?

SECOND THIEF: I hear!

FIRST THIEF: It is the song of the angels, brother. Look up! (*The* SECOND THIEF *slowly lifts his head, and the light which hitherto has flooded the other's face now widens and deepens in intensity and falls upon them both. The* SECOND THIEF *looks full into it and is dazzled*) The eyes of the blind are opened, and the ears of the deaf are unstopped.

SECOND THIEF: What is this that hath come to me?

FIRST THIEF: Love, brother, love.

SECOND THIEF: It is a miracle. Light! Brighter and brighter yet!

FIRST THIEF: Darest thou now?

SECOND THIEF: Aye.

(*He rises to his feet entranced*)

FIRST THIEF: Thy hand in mine?

SECOND THIEF: A highway all of gold——

FIRST THIEF: And they that are saved shall walk in it even unto the brightness of eternal day.

SECOND THIEF: Lord, Thou rememberest even me!

(*They begin to move slowly and with increasing ecstasy toward the light, which grows more and more brilliant*)

FIRST THIEF: To-day! With Thee in paradise!

(*And as they go off into the radiance the angelic choirs soar into highest song*)

CURTAIN

THE SWORD OF THE SAMURAI*

BY

TRACY D. MYGATT

*Awarded honorable mention in the Religious Drama Contest held by the Committee on Drama of the Federal Council of Churches in 1925. The separate edition published by The Century Co. for 25 cents, should always be secured for production purposes.

CHARACTERS

Takeshi Saito, a young aviator
Mrs. Saito, his mother
Yuriko, his fiancée
Tsuruko, his little sister
Masakiyo Saito, his grandfather
Kichi, their servant
Helen Sargent, an American missionary, guest in the Saito home
Dr. David Kenyon, a medical missionary
Saburo, a fisherman
Voices in the crowd

THE SWORD OF THE SAMURAI

Act One

Time: *Afternoon of May 31, 1924.*

Scene: *Living-room in the Saito home, Tokyo.*

The curtain rises on the living-room of Takeshi's *home, in Tokyo, set with the characteristic and simple beauty of the Japanese. There is little furniture in the room; but besides the bright silk cushions, piled on the spotless straw mats, against the neutral-tinted plaster walls, the room boasts three chairs, wickerwork, a concession to Western taste in general, and to* Helen Sargent *in particular, the California girl at present guest in the* Saito *home. Two of these are placed somewhat to center; the third is near the sacred alcove, at left, the floor of which is raised some four inches. In the alcove hangs a beautiful* kakemono, *the long painted silk scroll; beneath this, on a small stand, is a vase containing an exquisite arrangement of tall-stemmed iris, for it is May. Slightly to left of the vase is a skeleton stand, holding the ancestral double sword of the* samurai. *A little to right, on another and taller little stand, is the Buddhist shrine, its doors at present closed. The incense-jar and tapers beside this are now unlighted.*

For a fractional moment the room appears empty; then a small girl, eleven or twelve years old, dressed in a deliciously gay red kimono, is made out at rear, half squatting, half kneeling at the tiny bamboo table before her, laboriously busied with brush and scroll and Japanese writing-box. She looks up with relief as the sliding doors, rear, are pushed back, and an attractive Japanese maid, wearing the national dress, the sleeves of the dark kimono shorter than the little girl's, and the obi *less decorative, enters. Like* Tsuruko, *the little girl,* Kichi *wears no shoes,*

but, having left her clogs at the door, moves noiselessly in the typical tabi. *For a moment, through the space disclosed at rear, one glimpses two more sliding doors, the one at right giving on the garden (which, invisible to the audience, embraces two sides of the house); the other, at left, giving on the narrow little street outside. There is no furniture here, except for the mats, and the piled cushions, and the walls are the softly neutral walls of the living-room. Then one's eyes return to the maid, who is surveying the little girl with bewildered affection.*

KICHI: Tsuruko SAN——! What your honorable mother would say if she saw you——!

TSURUKO (*Turning a laughing little face to* KICHI) What's the matter, Kichi?

KICHI (*Pointing vehemently to the feet of the small figure*) Matter, indeed! You ask that, when you sit there like—well, I declare—perhaps a *frog*——

TSURUKO (*With a smiling backward glance at her feet*) Oh, I can sit as well as you, but my legs get tired! (*Slipping comfortably back to the floor*) Anyway, I don't mind being compared to a frog! Frogs have had poems written to them in Japan eleven hundred years! Brother Takeshi told me that last night, and he could n't understand a bit when I said you 'd never write a poem to a frog in America!

KICHI: Well, why would n't you?

TSURUKO (*With a delighted giggle*) You do ask such funny questions, Kichi! Why don't you go to America and find out?

KICHI: Maybe I will—! (*Then her face clouding*) Unless they pass that new custom the honorable master was talking about last night! But I should n't like to lose my manners there, as your honorable mother says you have!

TSURUKO: My honorable mother has enough to go round! And speaking of manners, it 's most improper for you to address me with such familiarity! (*Then, as the maid bows humbly,*

TSURUKO *springs up, slipping an affectionate little arm about her*) Oh, don't do that, Kichi! I was just teasing you! And that 's naughty when you 've been so kind to me ever since I came home from America! (*Then, a puzzled note in her voice*) Home? That 's what mother says it is here! But I don't know—it 's lovely in America! (*Turning excitedly back to* KICHI) That 's why I love having Miss Sargent in the house with us! She reminds me——

KICHI (*In eager assent*) Miss Sargent is a very nice honorable lady! But she does not give me enough to do! She wants to do it herself—and even help me with my work! That is not right! I wish honorable mistress would tell her——

(KICHI *breaks off abruptly, as the door, rear, is folded back, and* HELEN SARGENT *comes in quickly from the street, slipping out of her Western shoes into low slippers at the door.* KICHI *bows profoundly, and little* TSURUKO, *in an amusing mixture of American enthusiasm and Japanese courtesy, first bows and then rushes to the American girl.* HELEN *is tall, golden-haired, with a face whose strength is tempered with sweetness and humor. Simply and attractively dressed in Western clothes, she moves with the freedom of her native shores*)

HELEN (*With a quick smile to the maid, and a loving little pat to* TSURUKO) You blessed child! You look glad to see me! (*Then, to* KICHI) Did you want something, Kichi?

KICHI: Only, honorable lady, honorable mistress 'phoned me, inquire if you back from the mission! And she says is honorable Dr. Kenyon arrived?

HELEN (*With a quick and happy blush*) No! The last time I 'phoned, his boat had n't docked at Yokohama!

KICHI (*Bowing*) Thank you, honorable lady!

HELEN (*As* KICHI *is about to go out*) You 're coming to the church to-night, are n't you, Kichi?

KICHI (*Bowing and eager*) Oh, yes, please! I like to hear the happy Jesus' words! (*About to go out, she pauses; then, with wistful hesitation*) Do you think, honorable lady, that the young master will be signed to-night?

HELEN (*Gently, at the question, her face, too, has grown wistful*) I do not know, Kichi; it is for the young master to decide.

TSURUKO (*Irrepressibly, as* KICHI *goes out*) Don't you think it 's funny Brother Takeshi can't make up his mind? Why, even Kichi knew enough to get baptized! And brother Takeshi, he thinks he 's so grown up, and here he does n't even know whether he wants to be a Christian.

HELEN: Hush, dear, you don't understand! Your brother *is* a Christian if ever——

TSURUKO (*Rather indignantly*) He 's not baptized! Why, you know he 's not baptized! How can he be a Christian if he 's not baptized? Baptism 's the way you get to *being* a Christian! Why, I learned that in America, when mother was sick, and I lived with Uncle Matsuda.

HELEN (*Smiling*) You learned lots of things in America, did n't you, Tsuruko San? And I 've learned lots in Japan! And one of them is, what a very dear brother you have!

TSURUKO (*With quick enthusiasm*) He *does* tell nice stories! Heaps better than my uncle in San Francisco! And when he 's in his airplane, and flies high, high in the air like a sea-gull, oo-oh, it 's exciting!

HELEN (*She has seated herself in the wicker chair, near the small table*) You 're going to be very proud of him some day, Tsuruko, you and your mother and your honorable grandfather, Masakiyo Saito.

TSURUKO (*A rare note of awe in her voice*) Yes, honorable grandfather loves him very much! Even when he 's angry with Takeshi, like when he goes to church so much, he loves him! I'm not in it! He says Takeshi is a true *samurai*.

HELEN (*Starting, her voice thrilling softly, half forgetful of the child*) A *samurai!* I wonder! (*Then, rousing herself, she beckons* TSURUKO *close, and, leaning over, picks up from the table the characters on which she has been laboring*) You blessed baby, did you do all that?

TSURUKO (*With shy pleasure*) We learned some of it at school! And some of it—well, some of it I made up myself!

HELEN (*Suppressing a smile as she regards the wild-looking scroll she is holding up*) Yes, dear! I see! And just what——

TSURUKO (*Very pink, pointing with her brush*) Well, you see—that 's "Bird"—and when Brother Takeshi 's in his airplane, he says it 's "aviation"—and that means being a bird, so I thought——

HELEN (*Smiling, coming to her relief*) Of course! Well, I 'm sure it looks very pretty, and he 'll be very pleased with you for working on it so hard!

TSURUKO: Yes, it made me hot all down my back—*this* specially——

(*She is pointing with a proud little finger when there is a slight noise. The doors, rear, are folded back, and* TAKESHI, *dropping his clogs at the door, enters. A boy of twenty-three or four, of ancient Japanese tradition, clad now in conventional American dress, he carries in himself that curiously arresting blend of the two cultures. Nor is the result, as sometimes happens, awkward or negative. Physically, mentally, spiritually,* TAKESHI *is alert and alive; eager to grasp, one would say, the best in both countries, welding them into a finer something for himself and them. He is slightly above the average Japanese height, but for the rest, he is the typical young man of his class and country. Smiling and bowing to* HELEN *and his sister, he comes in quickly, in his hand a small wooden cage*)

HELEN: Good afternoon, Takeshi! (*Then, motioning him to a chair with a friendly gesture*) Can't you sit down?

TAKESHI (*Smiling as he takes the chair*) Thank you—a moment—it looks very inviting!

TSURUKO (*Suddenly perceiving the little cage in his hand*) Oo-oh! What 's that? (*Rushing over to him*) Something for me, Takeshi San?

TAKESHI (*Playfully withholding the little cage from the eager fingers*) Don't you wish you knew?

TSURUKO: Please! *Please!*

TAKESHI (*Smiling, to* HELEN) Has she been a good girl?

HELEN: Excellent! (*Holding up the scroll*) Working so hard on the characters for "aviation"!

TAKESHI: Dear little sister! You must have been writing it, while I was doing it! I've just come down! (*Then putting the little cage into her hand*) There you are! It 's a little *matsumushi!* (*As* TSURUKO *screams with delight, and* HELEN *hurries forward to see*) One of our singing insects! Listen! Listen!

HELEN (*Bending over the cage, almost as eager as the child*) What a darling!

TSURUKO (*Ecstatically*) Oh, *Takeshi! Oh!*

TAKESHI: And it will sing even better at night! You can bring it into the garden, Tsuruko, and we shall sit under the cherry-tree, and perhaps—who knows, little sister?—perhaps you will compose a poem to it! Its ancestors were singing in Japan, you know, five centuries before Columbus ever dreamed of discovering America! (*As she regards him, open-mouthed with admiration*) Run along, dear, now! Go into the garden; I must talk to Miss Sargent!

TSURUKO (*The cage clutched tight, making for the door with her quaint little bows*) Thank you! Thank you! And I will write another poem, too— (*Sudden mischief in her eyes, as she lingers, now half out of the room*) a poem about you, dear brother, and Yuriko San! Tell me—why are your eyes so bright? Are you going to see her this afternoon?

TAKESHI (*With a smile, as he motions the laughing little face away*) I hope so!

TSURUKO (*Turning to laugh, through the folding door*) I *know* so—! (*She is gone, and* HELEN *turns to him, smiling*)

HELEN: That was very nice of you, Takeshi! She 's been crazy to have a *matsumushi* a long time! All the family have been promising, but they kept forgetting! Tell me, did you have a good fly?

TAKESHI (*Glowing*) Glorious—! I went so high and so far! It 's the weather, partly, I suppose—this bright May sunshine we 're getting! The kind of day anything might happen—anything beautiful! And then, Tsuruko was right— (*With a faint, happy flush*) naughty little thing! I was thinking of Yuriko!

HELEN (*Warmly*) You and she will be very happy, I think! You remember, long before I knew you loved her, I told you she was the loveliest girl we had at the mission!

TAKESHI (*With a formal little bow*) I appreciate! Yes, I was thinking of her when I was up there, above the clouds, almost, it seemed to me, above Fuji itself! You know, she is glad I fly. She would fly herself, I know, but her honorable parents strenuously forbid! But your honorable parents—they would not forbid? Would you let me take you up, please?

HELEN (*In smiling horror*) My dear Takeshi, don't expect it! It sounds very romantic, being over Fuji with you in an airplane, but the truth is, I 'd rather climb it every step of the way, as I did two years ago, slipping in sand and ashes and over the poor torn sandals that strew the path, than go up with you, or any other human being! (*As he surveys her in astonishment*) The plain fact is, I 'd be seasick, and, even worse—afraid!

TAKESHI: As to the first, you very soon get used to the motion, and as to being afraid—well——

HELEN (*As he pauses, a little puzzled frown on his face*) You say that as if you did n't know what fear was.

TAKESHI (*Simply, wholly without conceit*) Perhaps I don't. Not physical fear. That was my bringing up. I owe it to my honorable grandfather, Masakiyo Saito.

HELEN: Your honorable grandfather is a very wonderful old man, Takeshi. You know, I wish he could understand what a privilege I feel it is to be staying in the same house with him this way. (*Continuing, half as if phrasing it to herself*) He is a kind of living embodiment of the ancient beauty and culture of your race! And the austerity, too—the austere courage that makes your *hara-kiri.* That makes a man take his own life rather than endure dishonor—*hara-kiri!*

TAKESHI: Curious how foreigners notice it!

HELEN: Well, why on earth should n't we? It 's an extraordinary thing! We have nothing like it at home. Suicide—yes! The cowardly, pathetic sort of thing that turns on the gas in the poor little furnished room! (*As he regards her in some bewilderment*) What I mean is, the people that do commit suicide, at home, usually recognize themselves they are wrong and cowardly, whereas the typical Japanese—well, there 's a style, a magnificence— (*With a quick smile*) Not that I 'm recommending it, Takeshi. Heaven forbid! But I do enjoy this association with your grandfather. It was very kind of your mother to arrange for my visit.

TAKESHI (*With a little ceremonious bow*) Was it not the least we could offer when your buildings were destroyed by the terrible earthquake? Our houses—it is easy to rebuild them. And is it not kind and gracious of you to remain here in our poor and humble home?

HELEN (*With a little friendly laugh*) "Poor and humble" indeed! Oh, Takeshi, Takeshi, are n't you ashamed of yourself? (*Hurrying on, as he is about to interpose*) Hush, I know it 's the Japanese in you, that polite depreciation of everything you possess, no matter how delightful it may be, like this beautiful home I am in. (*Then, regarding him in frank affection*) You

know, you 're a confusing young man! One minute so Western, I almost forget you were n't born in America, and the next, like a moment ago, you swing back to old Japan, where you belong.

TAKESHI (*Puzzled and suddenly half wistful*) Where I belong? In old Japan?

HELEN: Well, I mean—why, Takeshi, you know what I mean! (*In quick distress, as she reads a growing distress in his own face*) Oh, you don't think I meant you 're not just as *good* as anybody! Why, of course—That 's so obvious! How could any one think anything else?

TAKESHI (*A repressed and finely tempered pride in his low voice*) I am Japanese, as you have said. Asiatic. *Yellow.*

HELEN (*Hurriedly*) Well, but don't say it that way. It 's a thing to be proud of!

TAKESHI (*Quietly*) I *am* proud of it. (*Then, gently, looking into her puzzled, wistful eyes*) Listen, please, Miss Sargent! I *am* proud of being Japanese, and I know that when you remind me where I stand in that unloving family of nations, you remind me with kindness and affection. But there are those in your country—let us face it squarely—who would remind me with contumely and scorn. Those who would keep me out. Already I am ineligible to citizenship.

HELEN (*Biting her lip*) I know—that 's the root of the whole business—that wretched naturalization business.

TAKESHI (*With quiet dignity*) It is not that I desire your citizenship—I am very happy here in Tokyo. But it is strange to be considered ineligible—unfit! One wonders why. And now, if this Exclusion Clause of yours is carried——

HELEN (*Starting up in profound agitation*) It won't be! It can't be! It 's jingo talk! You have jingoes in your country, too. Surely you can understand! It does n't mean anything. Just an ugly flare-up of the ugliest thing there is. But it will never be carried! Never! Never!

TAKESHI (*Dubiously first, then with growing, if repressed, excitement*) I know—that's what most of the Japanese say. They say it won't be carried because there would n't be any sense in it. We have scrupulously observed the Gentlemen's Agreement. It has been like a treaty between our two countries. Your own secretary of state says we have faithfully kept it. Of course your country has the right to determine her own policy; and if she wants to restrict us even further, she has only to ask—only to consult us. But to exclude us in *this* way—by Congressional action, passing over our diplomats as if they were unfit to deal with—why, it would be— (*Seeking for a strong word*) it would be *discourteous—!* It would be—how do you say?—a "slap in the face."

HELEN (*In a low voice*) No one knows that better than your American friends, Takeshi. (*Then, rallying her hope*) But it won't pass.

TAKESHI: The American missionaries are worried. Look at the way you 're all cabling Washington! You, too, Miss Sargent. I think you are very worried indeed.

HELEN (*Turning to him passionately, in a moment of swift panic*) Well, why should n't we be? Good heavens, if that Immigration Bill goes through as it stands, with the Japanese Exclusion Clause, can you think of anything that would let us missionaries down more? Anything that would be a more bitter mockery of the spirit we try to preach—the spirit of Jesus Christ?

TAKESHI (*After a moment, quietly*) No, Miss Sargent. The Exclusion Clause has not got the spirit of Jesus Christ. (*Again he breaks off, apparently thinking deeply. She, too, is silent, hoping he will speak; presently*) You know, there are things I cannot tell about all that—it is difficult for me to speak— (*Hastily, to the question in her eyes*) No, no, I do not mean the Exclusion Clause. That is not what I am thinking about *most.* It is of what *He* would have—Jesus of Nazareth—of

what *He* would demand if I accept Him. The question of loyalty—loyalty to Him. It is this of which I think—*how much does He ask?*

HELEN (*Softly*) He asks all—even as He gave all.

TAKESHI (*With swift fervor*) I would not have Him if He asked less! I ask you, would I bring less to *Him*—Lord of all power and might—than was brought of old to the *daimyo* by the *samurai?*

HELEN (*Half to herself*) The *samurai* again! Those romantic knights of old Japan! (*Then, gently, to the eager boy beside her*) Do you know, Takeshi, when you do accept Him—and whether it will be in the church to-night or at some future time, I feel quite sure it will be *some* time—well, when you do accept Him, I think I shall be thinking of those old crusaders—rather, those *young* crusaders—the knights of the Middle Ages—who were so glad to give Him all—their youth and their courage, and their shining armor!

TAKESHI (*After a moment, deeply earnest*) I hope I shall be young, and when I come, I shall bring Him all, but when He speaks to my heart—oh, Miss Sargent, He tells me He does not want the shining armor.

HELEN (*After a long breath*) You are right, Takeshi; there has been too much war.

TAKESHI: And yet I want it so much! (*Hastily, at her start of surprise*) No, no, not war. I mean, I want the Imperial Service. (*As she still regards him in some perplexity*) Listen, please, Miss Sargent. I have not told you this before, because —well, I am myself so puzzled over it all. It is this way: you know how I love my flying, my aviation work? I don't have to tell *you.* How I 've loved it from the beginning!

HELEN: I know. You were made for it; it 's your career.

TAKESHI: My career. And though it is so modern—scientifically, do you know— (*His face lighting almost mystically*) I feel

it a career that would have delighted *them*—my ancestors. I feel as if sometimes when I flew high, high, above the soaring clouds, they, too, were there beside me, controlling, guiding, the spirits of my Dead—my noble *kami*. And now how happy they would be if I might enter the service of my Emperor!

HELEN (*As he pauses*) Well?

TAKESHI: And if I am to go on flying, it looks as if that would be the only way. You see, Miss Sargent, the air navigation company I am with are in financial straits—they are greatly cutting—how do you say?—their budget. So unless my grandfather can get me an appointment in the Imperial Service——

HELEN (*As again he breaks off*) But I don't see your difficulty, Takeshi. He will, will he not? You already have a splendid record, and he is so influential—he knows so many important men. Surely he can get you a good appointment.

TAKESHI (*Slowly*) It is likely. And if he does, that is just what I fear— (*In a low voice*) the temptation it will be to me to accept.

HELEN: But why on earth should n't you accept? And is n't the Imperial Service just what would please your ancestors most of all?

TAKESHI (*Half desperately*) Of course! Of course! (*As he feels her utterly bewildered gaze*) Cannot you see *why* they would be so happy? (*An irrepressible note of tempered pride in his throbbing voice*) My untold generations of warrior dead?

HELEN (*Reading it at last in his face*) You mean if war— (*She breaks off, recommencing with Western optimism*) But there is n't any war now, Takeshi. God forbid there ever should be again. Why should n't you accept the Imperial Service?

TAKESHI (*Shaking his head*) You do not understand. If I should accept Christ— (*His young face suddenly stern*) It is in the code—*Bushido*. *He*, too, said it: *"No man can serve two masters!"*

HELEN: Two masters? (*Then, studying his face*) Ah, I see! (*She is briefly silent; then*) So you will not come to the church to-night to be christened?

TAKESHI (*Gravely*) I think I must not—unless—unless something happens to make me understand.

HELEN: You are right to consider carefully. It is an honorable scruple, worthy of the son of a *samurai*. (*Then, simply*) You know, I wish Dr. Kenyon were back. I wish it for your sake as well as mine. A good talk with him might straighten things out for you—he 's such a wonderful person!

TAKESHI (*With a little smile at her flushed enthusiasm*) It is natural you should feel that way about the gentleman you are going to marry. Pardon—you do not mind my alluding?

HELEN (*Smiling frankly*) Why on earth should I mind? Do you and Yuriko San mind *my* alluding?

TAKESHI: I do not. It makes me happy! Happier than I 've ever been in my life. Thinking of Yuriko, and how good Dr. Kenyon was to arrange it in such a manner! It was because her honorable family, as well as mine, had so high a regard for him that they listened when he appealed on my behalf for her hand in marriage! I should be to-day the happiest young man in Japan if it were not— (*His face clouding in perplexity*) for my—my problem.

HELEN: What do you think Yuriko feels about it all?

TAKESHI (*A little bewildered*) Yuriko San? But she wants what I want.

HELEN (*With a smile*) Does she, indeed? Look out, Takeshi! You 're sounding very Eastern again.

TAKESHI: But she does, truly, Miss Sargent! You see—I don't know why she should deign—but Yuriko loves me.

HELEN (*Heartily*) I know she does. And if she wants what you want, it 's not in the passive, Eastern way of the dutiful bride to be, but really and actively——

(HELEN *turns as the doors, rear, are lightly opened, and* YURIKO *stands between them, looking in with a happy, smiling face. With her quick, dark eyes, and her shining hair, now pushed plainly off her forehead, and braided down her back, the tennis-racket still in her hand, she stands there, in her Western dress of short skirt and middy, bowing a formal little Japanese bow, to* TAKESHI *and* HELEN. HELEN *smiles back, and* TAKESHI *starts toward her with a quick*)

TAKESHI: Yuriko San, we were just talking about you.

YURIKO (*Laughingly motioning him to stay where he is*) Please, Takeshi San. Stay where you are. You and Miss Sargent.

TAKESHI: Then you come in. Tell us about your tennis.

YURIKO (*Smiling affectionately down at her racket*) No, no. That would n't be at all fitting. Think if your honorable mother should return and see me. I should not have come, but I have such exciting news.

HELEN: Well! Are n't you going to tell us?

YURIKO (*Mischievously*) Oh, do not ask me to tell it so fast! It is such lovely news! Could you not guess?

HELEN: I declare, you 're getting more of a little American tease every day.

YURIKO: Please, what is a "little American tease," honorable lady?

TAKESHI: (*In gay and mocking sternness*) *You.* Yuriko San.

HELEN: Yes, and calling me "honorable lady" won't help a bit! Now, then, out with it.

YURIKO (*Her eyes sparkling*) But guess! *Guess!*

HELEN (*Smiling at* TAKESHI) I don't believe she has any.

YURIKO: Oh, *yes!* My news would not like it if it could not be guessed.

HELEN: Your news is alive, then?

YURIKO (*Dimpling*) He was two minutes ago. Very much so.

HELEN (*With a quick, incredulous breath*) Yuriko! You don't mean——

TAKESHI: Yuriko! You don't mean the boat 's in, from America?

YURIKO (*Vastly enjoying her effect*) Honorable lady, listen! I am the bearer of good tidings. And I think Hotei is in it, too, the god of our good luck. (*Then, in some confusion*) Oh, dear, I should not have said that, should I? Now that I 'm a Christian.

HELEN (*Smiling in spite of herself*) Well, you just said he 's the Japanese luck-god, and so he is. (*Then, starting toward the mischievous young girl, still laughing between the folding doors*) Now if you don't hurry up——

YURIKO: Well, as I was coming up from my tennis at the Y. W. C. A., and thanks to your instruction, Miss Sargent, the score was——

HELEN: Congratulations, but *will* you hurry?

YURIKO: Well, coming up Ginza Street, I saw, from all the foreigners staring at the rickshaw-men, that the boat-train from Yokohama——

HELEN (*Beaming, as she rushes to the door*) Not another word! I 'm going.

(*She is about to step out, through the folding doors, but at this moment the door, L, giving on the street, L rear, slides open, and* DR. DAVID KENYON *enters, his tall, alert form instinct with vigor, and his eyes shining as they find* HELEN. YURIKO, *with a hasty bow, has slipped unobtrusively back, L rear*)

HELEN (*Hurrying to* KENYON, *warm hands outstretched*) *David!* It 's *you!*

KENYON (*Postponing his intention to take her in his arms, as his eyes make out* TAKESHI) And you! My dearest girl! (*Then, forcing himself forward, toward the young Japanese, as* YURIKO, *unnoticed by the rest, slips quietly out, L*) How are you, my dear boy?

TAKESHI (*Bowing, and then shaking hands*) Very glad to see you, sir! And so is Yuriko San. She— (*Blankly, looking for the young girl*) Why, where is she?

HELEN (*Stepping into the smaller room, rear, perceiving it is empty, and opening the little door, L*) Look! There she goes. Up Shimidzu-cho.

KENYON: Dear me, I hope she is n't running away from me. We used to be such good friends!

HELEN: It was n't that. Too unceremonious with her tennis-costume—that 's all.

TAKESHI (*Bowing to both, as he goes toward the door*) And you will want to talk. (*With a little understanding smile*) Yuriko teaches me. You will excuse, please? You will make yourself at home, please, Dr. Kenyon? My honorable mother will want you to stay with us.

KENYON: Why, that 's awfully kind of you, Takeshi, but I have my old room at the hospital—in the wing that was n't destroyed, you know. I sent the rickshaw-man there with my things, but I came on up here when I heard Miss Sargent was visiting here.

TAKESHI: I am sorry you cannot stay. (*Starting for the door*) I will tell my honorable mother you have come; she will wish you to have tea with us.

HELEN: That will be lovely. And you 'll come back, Takeshi? And bring Yuriko San with you, please. And then, later, to-night, you and Dr. Kenyon must have a real talk.

KENYON (*Catching something in* HELEN'S *voice*) Yes, indeed. There 's something special, then?

TAKESHI (*Hesitantly*) A problem, sir.

KENYON (*A little puzzled*) Problem? Are you so Western?

TAKESHI: Western? I hardly know. This—this is a religious problem.

HELEN (*Exchanging a look with* KENYON) Well, come back soon.

TAKESHI (*Slipping into his clogs, as he goes out*) Thank you. (*Alone together, in the simple, charming living-room,* HELEN *and* KENYON *survey each other with happy, shining eyes. Then he goes to her, smiling*)

KENYON (*Putting his arms round her*) I think this would be a good time.

HELEN (*Returning his kiss, and nestling her head on his shoulder*) Oh, my dear! My dear!

KENYON (*As she gently releases herself*) Missed me?

HELEN (*As she sits down, and he draws up a chair beside her*) Horribly. David—let me look at you. It 's been *endless.*

KENYON: Six months. Well, they 're over now, thank goodness! Darling, how soon can we be married?

HELEN (*Simply*) Any time you like. (*With a little laugh*) You know, we did n't get engaged the Day of the Bird, and I don't have to get untold kimonos and *obis* together, like little Yuriko.

KENYON (*Giving her hand a happy squeeze*) Bless you! (*Then, leaning back and regarding her in enormous satisfaction*) Yes, it really is *you.* Just the same! That 's the wonderful thing, Helen. When in other ways, it feels so different! Why, do you know, coming up from the station just now, I found myself staring, like a regular tourist! Just at first, I suppose. It 'll wear off! But the rickshaws, and clogs and kimonos, and the shrines and temple bells! And when I saw the children in the alleys, playing, with the sleeping babies tied on their backs, why, I declare I just had to hold on to myself from yanking them off, poor little souls—just the way I felt the first time I ever set on eyes on Dai Nippon.

HELEN (*Laughing at him*) You 'll get used to it again. (*Then, thoughtfully*) It 's a perplexing place—different—and yet they 're getting like us so terribly fast! Sort of a living paradox, Japan.

KENYON: Pretty different from us still, if you ask me.

HELEN: But trying awfully hard to be like—industrialism, for instance—why, the Japanese take to industrialism like a duck to water.

KENYON: Yes, I saw a new factory up on Nijo Street as I came along. Children in it, too—chuck-full. You could see them from the windows. What good is medical science till they stop child labor?

HELEN (*With sudden bitterness*) And there again, David—is n't there a parallel? What about our constitutional amendment?

KENYON (*Sadly*) What indeed?

HELEN: And education. Have n't they copied us there, once they got the idea? Schools and schools all over the place! Why, the average Japanese boy would rather be able to brag of making his grade than feel inside him all the lovely, tenuous culture of their past. I don't know how much they *really* care about it all, but they 're determined to catch up—and as they 've got some five hundred years behind, of course they have to hurry worse than New York.

KENYON (*Grimly*) Not worse than New York! My dear girl, if you 'd shared my experiences in the subway at the rush hour—I 'm a strong man, but I assure you——

HELEN (*Smiling, but not to be diverted*) Well, at least New York does n't have to stop off and do ceremonials in the midst of its modernity. And that 's what these people do. Think of it, factories and Buddhist shrines going on side by side. That 's what we 've done to the East. And Christianity thrown in, for good measure. (*Suddenly serious, her face wistful and tender*) And when they accept Christianity, how beautifully they *do* accept it! Young Takeshi now! If you knew how he is feeling and thinking about it all, David. Its relation to his life and his work. I wonder whether the average young man in America feels half so deeply before his confirmation?

KENYON: Not the *average* young man anywhere. Takeshi would be an unusually fine, sensitized type for any nation.

HELEN: Indeed he would. Of course you 've known him a long time, David, but I think you 'll feel a deepening when you talk. I hoped he 'd be baptized and confirmed to-night—the Bishop is coming to St. John's, and as usual for adults, he is performing the rites successively. Takeshi 's been going to church for months and months. Lots of people, Japanese and American both, think of him as a Christian.

KENYON: I know.

HELEN: And I thought to-night he would take the definite step. But I 'm not sure now. Something 's on his mind.

KENYON (*With some hesitation*) Not a girl? He has n't got mixed up with a *geisha,* or anything like that?

HELEN (*Almost indignantly*) He certainly has n't. The idea! He 's deeply in love with Yuriko, and very grateful to you for arranging it all. But anyway, he 's as much above *that* sort of thing, well—as you are yourself.

KENYON (*Taking her hand a moment in his*) Thank you, dear. Of course I did n't really think that. Though I tell you, Helen, considering the old tradition, it 's all the more credit to a young man when he does keep himself as Takeshi. Well, what do you think the difficulty is?

HELEN: It 's a scruple—a point of honor. The question of whether he can enter the Air Service of the Mikado when he professes Christianity. (*As* KENYON *listens, silent and absorbed*) It 's a curious thing to hear him, David. You get a sense of reversion to older Japanese modes of thought—with always that immense stress on allegiance—loyalty.

KENYON: But we all think of that, don't we, dear?

HELEN: Of course we do, in a way—and yet with Takeshi it 's a *very* intensely personal attitude. He 's like a young knight, a crusader, as it were, not yet formally Christianized—if you can think of it that way—and yet feeling the pull of that new Master so pervasively. So thrillingly the hope and joy of that new

love. It 's the *samurai,* David—the *samurai,* faithful unto death—hearing the call of this new Master.

KENYON: You put it very beautifully, my dearest. (*Then, after a moment*) That 's the Royce idea, is n't it—the thing he stresses in that book of his? He thinks it 's the very special contribution the Japanese will make to Christianity. *Loyalty!* (*Then, with rare bitterness*) Well, I 'm afraid he 'll need all the Christianity he can get.

HELEN (*Startled*) What do you mean?

KENYON: That accursed exclusion business.

HELEN: You don't mean it 's going to *pass?*

KENYON (*Getting up restively*) Oh, it can't. Of course it can't. How could it? Sheer nonsensical madness! And yet—mad things have been happening since 1914.

HELEN: Of course lots of the missionaries are anxious. I know there 's a clique—my native state—California.

KENYON: Kindly remember I 'm Californian myself, my dear. A citizen of no mean city. Though I must confess San Francisco never showed less regard for the teachings of the Little Brother.

HELEN (*In keen distress*) How can they feel so?

KENYON: Lots of them don't! Just remember David Starr Jordan 's as much a native son as its worst jingo. It 's just a small group—you know that as well as I do—a group of the strongest financial interests in the state. They 've bought the papers, of course, and the bought papers bluff the people, telling them what to think, and what not to think, till most of them forget to think at all. That 's the mischief of it. (*He is briefly silent, staring ahead of him; then, passionately*) My God, I pray it won't pass!

HELEN: Don't Americans understand only a handful of Japanese have been emigrating since the Gentlemen's Agreement in 1918? About six hundred and eighty-five a year?

KENYON: No, I don't think they understand anything.

HELEN: Don't they understand that if the Japanese were included in the regular quota provisions only a hundred and fifty would come every year? A hundred and fifty, into a nation of one hundred and fifteen *millions?*

KENYON (*Shaking his head*) No, my dear. Hardly any one understands that. They won't take the trouble.

HELEN: But then it 's a matter of *education,* is n't it? Oh, Davy, it 's up to *us—all* the missionaries—all the forward-looking churches—you and me. We 've got to make our own people *understand.*

KENYON (*With a little twisted smile*) We thought we were out to convert the heathen, did n't we? It seems kinds of tough, having to convert the *church.*

HELEN: Anyway, they were decent about the relief money, were n't they? After the earthquake?

KENYON: Splendid. And giving it now, for the hospital. Everywhere I went, people opened up their purses. I think they really enjoyed giving. California alone raised thousands. But if the Exclusion Clause is carried—think, Helen! They 're a proud people, these Japanese—proud and sensitive. And I swear their pride 's noble, if ever pride was. Think how bitter it will be to them to take this money from people that won't tolerate them in their country on a par with other nationals.

HELEN (*In a low voice; she is deeply moved*) I can't think any more—just pray. (*For a moment she is still, with closed eyes, then, hopefully*) David! If I cabled again to California——

KENYON: No use, darling. We shall hear from California before she hears from us.

HELEN (*Starting*) Do you mean it 's as close as *that?*

KENYON: If the last radios we got on the steamer were correct, it 's very close. Sh-h!

(*He breaks off hurriedly at a sound of steps in the room, rear, rising, with* HELEN, *as the sliding doors are opened,*

and MRS. SAITO *enters. She is followed by* TSURUKO, *who flashes a shy smile at* KENYON. *Both have removed their clogs and wear only the white* tabi *on their feet.* MRS. SAITO *is a small, slightly plump woman, somewhat past middle age, and looking older because of the cautious bounds within which her uneventful life has passed. She wears a rich purple* obi *over her dark silk kimono, which reaches the tiny feet on which she advances to her guests with the little pigeon-toed steps of Japanese good breeding. Beneath the high pompadour of the plentiful, graying black hair, her eyes beam with kindness and subdued pleasure. One perceives in her something of the long culture of the past, and her passive rejection, save in so far as kindness and good breeding dictate, of the modern convention. At her gracious bow,* HELEN *and young* KENYON *themselves, half unconsciously, have become more dignified and less abrupt*)

MRS. SAITO (*After the formal salutation briefly giving* KENYON *a limp little hand*) We are glad to see you again, Dr. Kenyon! It is kind of you to honor again our humble home. (*Then, with a gesture, indicating to him the honored seat near the sacred alcove*) Please be seated. (*At the same time pointing* HELEN *to another chair, which she takes, as* KENYON *his, after* MRS. SAITO *has seated herself, with the Japanese grace little* TSURUKO *finds so difficult, on the bright silk cushion near the small table, R, rear*) And you, please, dear Miss Sargent. And Tsuruko. (*Motioning* TSURUKO *to a cushion beside her own, she turns back to* KENYON; *then, graciously*) I hope you left your honorable parents in San Francisco in good health?

KENYON: I thank you. They are both very well indeed. They desired me to convey to you their respectful salutations. (*As she bows acknowledgment, he goes on less constrainedly*) The fact is, Mrs. Saito, my mother is still playing with the idea of coming to Tokyo.

MRS. SAITO (*Faintly puzzled*) Excuse me—"playing with the idea?"

KENYON (*Smiling*) I mean, she is still talking about coming to Japan. But you see my father insists he can't get on at home without her.

MRS. SAITO (*Increasingly bewildered*) Forgive me, Dr. Kenyon, but if your honorable father insists, how can your honorable mother speak of going?

HELEN (*Coming to a smiling rescue*) Well, you see, dear Mrs. Saito, over in America, the husband never means anything by "insisting"; the wife goes on making her plans just the same. I mean— (*Flashing a mischievous smile at* KENYON) I mean in families of good breeding, like Dr. Kenyon's. It is only in our lower classes that a husband compels his wife.

MRS. SAITO (*Sighing, as she bows acknowledgment to* HELEN) It is a strange country, America. (*Then, clapping her hands for the maid*) We shall have tea presently. (*Then, reverting, with a final hand-shake*) I hope Yuriko San will not bring too many of these American ideas to my son. Not that she has been in America, but her studies at the mission will have taught her many strange customs. I have spoken of this also to Tsuruko. Have I not, little daughter?

TSURUKO: Yes, *okaa san,* but I like America very much.

MRS. SAITO (*Hastily, fearing she has been discourteous to her guests*) Of course you like it, little daughter. (*Turning gently to* HELEN *and* KENYON) You must please excuse me. I have not wished to be discourteous; I greatly admire your honorable country. It is only that—that some of its ways are strange.

KENYON: They are indeed, dear Mrs. Saito. And many of the people in my country think it would be well for them to travel here in Japan, to learn more of the ways of your people, and, in the same way, for more of your people to come to us.

MRS. SAITO (*After a moment, with quiet pride*) Pardon. I did not know that your people wanted my people. I have been otherwise informed.

KENYON (*Biting his lip, as* HELEN *flushes in distress*) I beg you to believe very many of us do.

MRS. SAITO (*With a sad, gentle dignity motioning him back to the seat from which he has sprung*) If there were more Americans like yourself and Miss Sargent— (*Then, as for an impetuous moment* HELEN, *moved by the affectionate smile, seizes* MRS. SAITO'S *hand, pressing it quickly, her face again impassive*) But we will not speak of this further. It is a subject of pain to us all. Most of all I believe, to my husband's father, Masakiyo Saito, and I wish that he may enjoy the tea-hour with us.

HELEN (*With real pleasure*) Honorable Masakiyo Saito is coming to tea with us?

MRS. SAITO: He would be here now, but he was asked to confer with the *genro.*

KENYON: It is a wonderful thing, at his great age, to keep so strong and clear a mind.

MRS. SAITO: Many of our statesmen are so. Men past eighty, and even ninety. And though sometimes they are frail in body, the infirmities of age have no power over the mind of the *genro* —our Elder Statesmen. (*Then, as* KICHI *enters, carrying the tea-things on a lacquered tray, directing the maid to place them on the small table near her*) Here, Kichi, if you please. And when you return, let us have some *okashi.*

KICHI (*Disposing the tea-things; she has smiled a shy welcome to* KENYON) Yes, honorable mistress.

MRS. SAITO (*To* HELEN *and* KENYON, *beginning to pour the tea*) We must, I fear, have tea without Masakiyo Saito. You will be tired from your journey. (*Passing the tea, from* KICHI, *to* HELEN *and* KENYON) But this will renew you, soul as well as body. As it has renewed men for many centuries, in China, and here in Nippon. Flowers—and paintings—and tea. (*Her quiet eyes full of a sad and gentle past*) There have been beautiful things, Dr. Kenyon, that we shall never see again—all gathered round that simple little herb I have poured, out of

my old Satsuma tea-jar, from the bag of Chinese brocade which has been in our house for five generations, into your tea-cup. I think—perhaps—it takes a people very old to make so much of something so simple as tea.

KENYON (*Gently, sipping his tea, as* MRS. SAITO *gravely drinks hers*) The past is not quite gone, Mrs. Saito, when I sit here, in your home. (*Pointing to the flowers in the alcove*) And what a lovely flower-arrangement there! Did little Tsuruko——

MRS. SAITO (*Shaking her head*) No, Dr. Kenyon, Tsuruko cares for the flower-arrangement of the Americans, I think.

HELEN (*With a smile*) Something of the hit or miss method, I 'm afraid, David. No, Mrs. Saito arranged those flowers herself. But she is going to teach me.

MRS. SAITO: I think Miss Sargent is very kind to care. I will try to teach her.

(*She turns as the door L rear, is softly opened, and* TAKESHI *and* YURIKO, *slipping out of their clogs at the entrance, enter the room quietly. The young girl is now faultlessly attired in a charming kimono of dark blue, with very long sleeves and elaborate* obi. *She and* TAKESHI *enter, bowing, first to* MRS. SAITO, *and then to* DR. KENYON, *who has risen at the young girl's entrance*)

TAKESHI: Honorable mother, we are sorry to be late.

MRS. SAITO: No doubt you had business. (*Returning little* YURIKO'S *salutation*) Welcome, my child. Be seated. The tea waits. My son will find you a comfortable cushion.

(TAKESHI, *in response to his mother's gesture, motions* YURIKO *to a cushion, R rear, near* HELEN'S *chair, upon which, with a shy bow to* KENYON, *who greets her cordially, with a* "How do you do, Miss Yuriko?" *she seats herself gracefully, Japanese fashion, accepting the little stool* KICHI *now brings her from a hidden part of the inner room, L rear, and receiving upon it the tea the maid passes her from* MRS. SAITO)

TAKESHI (*Turning to his mother*) Yes, honorable mother. (*Then, courteously including the rest, as he sips the tea* KICHI *passes him before she softly, and presently, leaves the room*) I stepped in a moment at the offices of the Air Navigation Company, to see if affairs were indeed as bad as painted.

HELEN: And it was better than you feared, was n't it, Takeshi?

TAKESHI (*Ruefully*) It was much worse, Miss Sargent. Their affairs are badly involved. It looks as if another group were deliberately trying to crowd them out—Big Business, I suppose—and now it looks like a Big Crash. (*Turning to the young doctor*) Does n't it sound like America, Dr. Kenyon? We, too, are becoming so civilized.

KENYON: And if your aviation company fails, Takeshi, does that mean you 'll be out of a job?

TAKESHI (*Smiling*) Just the "job" part would n't bother me so much—not about the money—one can live on very little, if one likes rice as much as I do—but my work itself—my flying—well— (*His face clouded now*) I feel as if I should be a little lost without my flying.

MRS. SAITO (*As* KICHI *returns with rice-cakes and sweets*) Will you please have some sweets now? (*Then, as* KICHI *goes unobtrusively from one to another, she continues with faint, repressed excitement*) Pardon, Dr. Kenyon, but we hope that my honorable father-in-law, Masakiyo Saito, may be able to procure Takeshi a post in the Air Service of the Emperor.

KENYON (*Catching something of her tempered excitement*) How splendid! I congratulate you all.

TAKESHI (*In a low, constrained voice, as* HELEN *tries to flash* KENYON *a warning*) Please! It is not yet done.

YURIKO (*Shyly, looking up from her tea-cup*) I met Takeshi coming out, and there were *so* many people in the streets. You would hardly believe it. That was what made us late. I am so sorry. Takeshi almost feared I should be hurt in the crowd on Ginza Street.

KENYON: I noticed some confusion myself, coming up, but I thought perhaps it was because I 'd been away and forgotten the narrow little streets and the rickshaws. But the people were certainly talking a great deal.

TSURUKO (*Unable longer to contain herself*) Yes, I noticed that, too. From the garden, just now, I could hear, *"Bzzzz! Bzzzz! Bzzzz!"* right over the voice of my new *matsumushi.*

MRS. SAITO (*Motioning her to silence*) Hush, Tsuruko.

HELEN: Why, I believe I noticed it when I came in some time ago, this afternoon! I 'd forgotten, but I remember now. Why, yes. Everywhere little groups of people, talking—talking—and it seemed to me they lowered their voices when I came by. I wonder what it was all about.

KENYON (*In a low voice, his face suddenly set*) I 'm afraid we can but too well guess.

(HELEN *is flashing him a startled glance, when again the door, L rear, opens, and slowly, his clogs shed at the entrance, moving with a dignity that surmounts his frail old age,* MASAKIYO SAITO *enters. He is clad in the prescribed ceremonial black, his kimono of rich texture. The Japanese prostrate themselves, and* KENYON *and* HELEN *also, as, returning their salutations and those of his family, the old man approaches the seat* MRS. SAITO *is motioning him to occupy. Little* TSURUKO, *with a touch of Americanism, after a quick little bow, has sprung to her feet and gently steers him, bowing as she goes, to the cushion, on which he presently sinks*)

MASAKIYO (*Courteously*) I regret being late. The *genro* sent for me on affairs of state. I could not but accept. It is seldom we meet now. (*With a grave salutation to* KENYON) I am glad you have returned, Dr. Kenyon. I trust you are well?

KENYON (*Bowing, and resuming his seat, as* HELEN *hers*) I thank you, sir; I am well. I trust you are well.

MASAKIYO (*Gravely accepting the tea* KICHI *brings him*) I am eighty-eight years old, Dr. Kenyon. One is neither well nor ill in body when so long a span has passed. I desire only that I may serve my Emperor, and then pass, purified, into the Light Eternal.

KENYON (*With a gentle respect*) But you know, sir, that your family and your nation trust to keep you with them for a long time yet.

MASAKIYO (*Turning to the young man with a grave smile*) My family, Dr. Kenyon, are not all here. I long also to salute those beyond.

KENYON (*At a loss*) I know you have kindred in California.

MASAKIYO (*As* KENYON *breaks off, at the protest of the gently raised old hand*) And beyond California, Dr. Kenyon. (*With a glance of calm affection at his family*) And these present know that I long to salute those others, too, those who carried *that*— (*With a sudden gesture to the old double sword in the alcove*) the sword of the *samurai*—for *daimyo* and country and the Son of Heaven. (*He is silent a moment; then, as he feels their intent silence waiting for him, he resumes, always with that finely repressed emotion*) I was thinking of them to-day, as I listened to the talk of the *genro*—thinking of them —of my great and victorious dead—wondering if I have lived too long, if— (*His voice still lower, his face set and stern*) if that dishonor of which I have heard speak should come upon my country.

HELEN (*Passionately, breaking the silence that follows*) No, no, it will not come. Live longer! Live longer, honorable Masakiyo Saito. Live to forget even the threat of that dishonor!

MASAKIYO (*After a moment of grave, half-puzzled regard of her*) I thank you, *ojō san,* but I have my grandson! He, the head of our house—he will remain when I am gone.

TAKESHI (*Bowing deeply to the old man, though his face is troubled*) Honorable grandfather——

MASAKIYO (*Grave eyes on* TAKESHI) You know the tradition—you know the Code—*Bushido!* You are without fear, and that is well—for the first of all things to remember is, "When thou leavest the gates of thy house, go as one prepared for all adventure—as one never to return."

(*Upon the hush that follows the old man's words, there is a sudden noise, rear, and* KICHI *hurries into the room, in profound and scarcely repressed agitation*)

KICHI (*Bowing rather distractedly to* MRS. SAITO) Pardon, honorable mistress, but Saburo—the fisherman from the sea who sometimes comes—he is here—he craves admittance.

MRS. SAITO (*In quietly controlled displeasure*) Give him food and repose within, Kichi, but do not admit him here. Tell him we have guests, and that Masakiyo Saito is with us.

KICHI: Pardon, I have told that, honorable mistress, but he implored me. He is frightened of something. It is the honorable Masakiyo Saito whom he wishes to see.

MASAKIYO (*Quietly*) Bid him enter.

(KICHI *goes out quickly, as* HELEN, *looking swiftly from one to the other, flashes* KENYON *that new look of swift and growing dread.* MRS. SAITO, *herself trying not to catch the sense of foreboding with which the room seems suddenly filled, turns to her guests calmly*)

MRS. SAITO: My husband was saved in a storm at sea, long years ago, by this man's father. It was off the Suruga coast, where the waves are wild. Masakiyo Saito has never forgotten the deed, and often when this poor Saburo comes to him, in time of trouble or fancied trouble, he comforts him. For he pities his superstition.

MASAKIYO (*Gravely*) The gods sometimes warn such people first.

(*Then, as the door opens, and* SABURO *enters, clad in the rough dress—trousers and coolie coat—of the Japanese fisherman, his feet bare, he turns to him with gentle courtesy*)

What dost thou crave, Saburo?

(*For a moment, between his fright over what he has seen, and his natural timidity in the presence of so many strangers, he stands quite still, unable to speak, clutching in his hand the basket of fresh fish he carries. Then, bowing to them all, but especially to the old man*)

SABURO: Pardon, *ojii sama*—I fear——

MASAKIYO: Fear is ignoble.

SABURO: Pardon, *ojii sama; I* am ignoble! I cannot help my fear.

MASAKIYO (*With sudden sternness*) Thou art *Japanese!*

SABURO (*Bowing, as if he had received a gift, and for a moment straightening his shoulders*) I shall try to remember. But it is that which makes me fear. It is not only fear for myself. It is for my country as well—and the Son of Heaven. (*Then, almost eloquent with the intensity of his terror*) Oh, honorable master, what disaster threatens Dai Nippon that a great cloud with the scales of a thousand fish stands over Fujiyama? (*Conscious of the repressed excitement of the Japanese*) What disaster? It was not I alone who saw the cloud. All of us, in our boats, fishing, looked up, and saw it suddenly, and feared to speak, because of our great fear, lest the waves, hearing us, rise higher in their might and destroy us! For "the sea has a soul and knows." O honorable master, is it the portent of a typhoon, that that great cloud of the fish's scales stands veiling the face of our sacred mountain?

(*For a long moment the old man remains silent; then, as a confusion of voices comes suddenly from without, his face subtly changes. Still outwardly calm, but deeply moved within himself, he turns slowly to the fisherman, his austere voice carrying a curious weight to all*)

MASAKIYO: A typhoon, sayest thou, Saburo? (*Then, as a sharply clanging bell, rapidly approaching, begins to punctuate the confused noise of voices, sharply*) Hark! Hearest thou? We shall soon know what that cloud portends. Perhaps a disaster greater than a typhoon.

KICHI (*Rushing into the room*) Honorable master! The street is full of people! They are all reading—something—I know not —the Newsboy——

MASAKIYO (*Quietly—the sharply clanging bell now at their very door*) Bring us the paper, Kichi.

TSURUKO (*Springing up excitedly as* KICHI *runs out*) Mother, what *is* it?

MRS. SAITO (*Still calmly*) Hush, Tsuruko; only a piece of news.

SABURO (*Under his breath, as* KICHI *rushes in again, with the extra, the big bell clanging*) The disaster!

(*Then, as* KICHI, *somewhat awed by the impassive old man, thrusts the extra into his hand, there is a sudden sharp silence. Outside, too, there is an abatement of the uproar.* MASAKIYO *sits, briefly reading; then, sternly repressing the tremors of his old age, he turns with austere dignity to* TAKESHI, *who now irrepressibly upon his feet, receives the paper from the worn old hand*)

MASAKIYO (*In a calm voice that masks his deep emotion*) Do my eyes fail, or is it true?

TAKESHI (*His face going white as he reads*) It is true!

HELEN (*Starting toward them, strained and faint*) Not—not the *Exclusion* Clause?

(*Then, as* TAKESHI *silently passes her the paper, she bursts into tears, flinging the paper passionately from her, to the incredulous amazement of* KICHI, *who goes out, unobserved*)

Oh, no—no—*no!*

KENYON (*Himself deeply moved, a steadying hand on her shoulder*) Helen! Helen!

SABURO (*Almost unconsciously*) This must be—the disaster! What does it mean?

TSURUKO (*Excitedly*) Yes, grandfather; what does it mean?

MASAKIYO (*Slowly, to them all, and yet to himself alone, with a dignity that still cannot wholly mask his deep pain*) "The fallen blossom never returns to the branch; the shattered mirror never again reflects." It means—it means—that American-Japanese friendship is dead.

HELEN (*Her voice half choked with the tears she cannot hold back*) No, *no!* Our friendship shall endure!

MASAKIYO (*As before*) It means—that the gates of friendship America bade us open, she now shuts against us.

HELEN: Forgive us! Forgive my people!

TAKESHI (*Deeply moved*) Honorable grandfather, I beg you——

MASAKIYO (*Silencing him by a quietly raised hand, with the same impassivity drawing a packet from his pocket, and giving it to* TAKESHI) Take this! Your commission in the Air Service, from the Emperor! I obtained it for you to-day. Take it! It is a fitting time to remember whom you serve. Your lineage —your name— You shall be ready, Takeshi Saito, so that some day, when the armies of the Son of Heaven shall be gathered——

HELEN (*With a low cry of despair, her eyes on the boy, who holds the papers laxly*) Takeshi! Takeshi!

TAKESHI (*Gathering himself together*) Honorable grandfather—one moment—I beg you—I must have time to consider my duty.

MASAKIYO (*With cold impassivity, beneath which smolder the ancient passionate fires*) You are the head of our house. It should not be for me to remind you there is but one duty—when the Emperor calls—the Son of Heaven.

TAKESHI (*Slowly, gazing about him, as if suddenly aware that something, far away, has come close*) The Son of Heaven? I do not know—perhaps—perhaps—it is the Son of Man!

(*Slowly, as they stand looking from him to one another.*)

CURTAIN

Act Two

TIME: *Early evening.*

SCENE: *Same as Act One.*

Again the curtain rises on the living-room. Objectively, it looks virtually as in Act One. It is now, however, twilight, and the lamp on the little table throws a wistful dimness over everything; except, indeed, cheerful little TSURUKO *herself. She is seated on a cushion near-by, delightedly absorbing the last of the tale the fisherman has been recounting.* SABURO *himself, at the low table, to center, is concluding his supper; for a nearly emptied plate of chicken and a tea-cup is before him, and the rice-bowl in his hand is almost empty.*

SABURO (*As impressively as a very full mouth permits , as he helps himself to chicken with liberal chop-sticks*) And that, *ojō sama,* is the end of the story.

TSURUKO (*With a regretful sigh*) Oh, *what* a pity! I did like it *so* much! (*Then, jumping up and running over to him*) Does your meat taste good, Saburo?

SABURO (*An efficient shovelful poised on the chop-sticks*) Excellent, *ojō sama!* It is the best chicken stew I ever tasted. (*Then, preparing to rise*) But I must go now.

TSURUKO: Oh, *no!* You 're going to tell me another story.

SABURO: I cannot, honorable young lady. I have already told you the only story I know. Moreover, I should not be here. Your honorable mother would not like it at all. It is breaking custom.

TSURUKO (*Smiling*) That 's all right, Saburo. I 've lived in Americe. There they make and break custom every day. It is what makes them so pleasant to live with.

SABURO (*Shaking his head*) It is not right. The *oku sama* Saito will not like it at all. One should not break custom.

TSURUKO: Well, I 'm only making a *new* custom! Think of it that way, Saburo. (*Then, impatiently*) Anyway, they should n't

have gone off and left me all alone. I thought *you'd* gone, too. Everything so still! All the people down on Ginza Street, I suppose. Even Kichi! And Brother Takeshi's gone off in the other direction, with Dr. Kenyon. Everybody's gone—everybody except poor little Tsuruko. I don't understand it at all. It was all right till this afternoon, and that man with the extras and the bell—but ever since— (*With a little shiver*) Saburo, has n't it felt terribly *queer* to you ever since?

SABURO (*Ominously*) When I saw that great cloud with the scales of a thousand fish——

TSURUKO (*Quickly*) Yes, yes, you 've told us about that. Now I want another story.

SABURO: I must go.

TSURUKO (*Ingratiatingly, hovering about him*) A teeny-weeny more chicken? And some tea? Oh, please, Saburo dear! (*Serving him with both, she goes coaxingly on, as he resumes his eating*) Now, then, for the story. You must know such a lot. F'r instance—*ghost-stories*—they 're the nicest—they give you such a creepy shiver down your back. (*Hurrying on, as he regards her in some bewilderment*) Brother Takeshi told me one about the lovely lady who came back to her lover after she was dead, carrying a peony lantern. Don't you know any like that? (*As, nonplussed, he shakes his head*) But you must know *something!* Not stories of old Japan? Brother Takeshi says they had the nicest stories then. (*Urgently, as he gets up, prepared for departure*) Where did your father live, anyway, that he never heard any ghost-stories?

SABURO (*Ominously*) On the Suruga coast, Tsuruko San, where the waves are wild. And my father was far too occupied casting his nets to think of *shiriyo*—save of course— (*His voice hushed*) *on the Night of the Bon.*

TSURUKO (*Plopping down on her cushion, her voice hopeful and thrilled*) *The Night of the Bon?* But that—that 's the Festival of the Dead!

SABURO (*Half unconsciously, as he reseats himself, his manner increasingly hushed and full of a simple, half-tragic dignity*) Surely, surely! *The Night of the Bon!* Ah, how I remember that night as a child, when I swam far out on the waves, after the ghost-light!

TSURUKO (*Softly, her eyes glowing*) Ghost-lights?

SABURO (*Simply, he has no thought for the story, as his voice goes on, hushed with the relived beauty*) Surely—the little lanterns we launch upon the sea that the dead may know we remember. In some places it is said they make a little boat—a tiny junk—and within they place food and water, and kindled incense, for the dead, and they write holy words upon the "strange high prows," and they launch it at the Hour of the Ox. But where I lived, off Suruga, we launched lanterns only; and the ghosts could not fail to see them, they beamed so bright upon the sea.

TSURUKO (*Softly, she is wholly absorbed*) What color were they? Red?

SABURO (*Lost in memories*) Not red alone. There were five colors, for the five are the colors of the elements of the Holy One. (*Raptly*) *Namu 'Amida Butsu!* There was blue for Ether, and black for Earth, and white for Water, and red for Fire, and yellow for Wind. They were all five upon the little lanterns, shining through from the candles placed within. Ah, how they gleamed when I swam out to them!

TSURUKO (*Catching her breath*) Oh, I wish I had been there, too!

SABURO (*In a horror that tries to push his mystic experience from him*) Nay, say not so! It was a perilous thing I did, to swim upon the waves the Night of the Bon, and it brought me misfortune. Almost like a *kami* child I became—an unfortunate who knows disaster from afar off—like this to-day.

(*He breaks off hurriedly, bowing, in considerable embarrassment, as the doors open, and* TAKESHI *enters. He carries a lighted lantern which he sets down upon the small table. He is pale but composed; deeply preoccupied, one would say, and yet managing a smile for* TSURUKO, *who*

has run to him, and giving a hesitant and very surprised welcome to SABURO)

TAKESHI: Tsuruko! I thought you were asleep.

TSURUKO: Oh, *no!* Not when everything 's so exciting. Saburo was just speaking of it—that horrid 'Sclusion that 's making everybody so miserable. It seems the 'Sclusion came because he swam on the waves to the little ghost-ships the Night of the Bon—and ever since——

TAKESHI (*Turning with weary displeasure to* SABURO, *who is cautiously edging toward the door*) Saburo! What is this? I thought you would have gone.

SABURO (*Bowing humbly*) Pardon, young master. The honorable Tsuruko asked me to partake of a little nourishment.

TAKESHI: Yes, yes, but——

TSURUKO (*Swiftly going to* TAKESHI) Truly, it 's all my fault, Takeshi San. But I wish you would n't be mad! We've had a lovely time.

TAKESHI (*Dubiously*) I suppose it 's no great matter. (*Then, to* SABURO, *who is about to creep out, arresting him with a gesture, mingled pity and irritation in his young voice*) Tell me, Saburo: this is nonsense she tells me, is it not? That you think they passed the Exclusion Clause in America because you swam on the sea the Night of the Bon?

SABURO (*Humbly stubborn, coming back into the room*) I know not, young master! I do not understand these things. But it is not good to swim on the waves the Night of the Bon. "The sea has a soul and knows." You are wiser than I, who know nothing, but ever since that night I have had misfortune—and always, far worse than all else— (*A real horror in the unsteady voice*) always, *fear!*

(*For a moment* TAKESHI *regards him in silence; then, swiftly, he snatches up the lantern he has brought in, and holds it above the pitiful, quivering face. Then, wonderingly, but with a new gentleness*)

TAKESHI: You *are* afraid! (*Then, setting down the lantern*) O Saburo, cast out fear! Cast it out! I was so sorry for you to-day, when you came to my honorable grandfather! It must be so dreadful to be afraid.

SABURO: Yes, master! But *danna sama* Masakiyo Saito showed me I had reason to fear, did he not? And what of the talk in the streets to-night? That America hates us, and desires to war upon us? Is there not everywhere fear and anger and grief —over this thing I do not understand?

TAKESHI: Listen, Saburo. You can't understand. I haven't time to explain it to you; but do not be afraid. Just go quietly back to your boat.

(*Obediently, but very wistfully,* SABURO *turns*)

SABURO: Yes, master.

TAKESHI (*Suddenly moved by the hopeless voice, his own voice touched with a deep emotion*) Saburo—listen! Do you know there is Someone waiting for you in your boat?

SABURO: Not for me, young master. I am all alone.

TAKESHI (*A soft and thrilling exultation surging through voice and words*) No, Saburo—you are not alone. None of us is alone. *He* is waiting there, always—just waiting till you call.

SABURO: Of whom do you speak, young master? I know you have family and friends, but I—I am only a poor fisherman.

TAKESHI: That 's just it, Saburo! Poor fishermen were always His friends. I think He loved them best. Once, when there was a great storm, and fishermen thought the little boat was sinking, they called to Him, as He lay upon a pillow, sleeping; and He commanded the wind and the waves, saying "Peace, be still!" And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. And again, another time, He came walking to them on the waves, and the waves obeyed Him. They were frightened, until they saw who it was, and then they rejoiced, and received Him into their boat. You see, Saburo, He did not want His friends to be frightened, so He taught them love—because perfect love casteth out fear.

SABURO (*Wonderingly*) Who was this Man? I should have liked to know Him!

TAKESHI (*Simply*) So should I, Saburo. (*Then, with low, intense energy*) But you can know Him to-night; you can begin to know Him. I tell you He is waiting for you in your little boat, even as He waited for His friends long ago, in Galilee.

TSURUKO (*Softly*) O, Takeshi, now I know whom you mean!

SABURO (*With wistful eagerness*) You are sure He will cast out my fear?

TAKESHI (*With still, calm certainty*) He will cast it out, Saburo. You have only to ask; for every one that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. And to-morrow, Saburo, go to His house on Shmidzu-cho——

SABURO: What is His name, young master? For whom shall I ask?

TAKESHI (*With sudden thrilling resonance*) For Jesus of Nazareth!

SABURO (*Repeating it softly, to himself*) Jesus of Nazareth! I like that name.

TAKESHI (*More to himself than* SABURO) For Jesus, the Son of Man. For Christ, the Son of God—the Saviour and Redeemer of the world! (*Then, urging him gently toward the door*) Go now, Saburo; they will tell you more to-morrow.

SABURO (*Wistfully*) But if He is in my boat, why should I go to His house? I should like to keep Him always in my boat.

TSURUKO (*Coming forward with shy earnestness, her face kindled*) Listen, please, Saburo! I know what Brother Takeshi means. His friends live in that house on Shmidzu-cho. You see, He has loved people so much and so long that He has friends all over the world. And some day everybody will be His friend. That will be when "Thy Kingdom come."

SABURO (*With deep, repressed emotion*) There is a light in my heart, warm and glad, like a bright candle.

TSURUKO (*As she and* TAKESHI *for a moment touch his hand*) That bright candle is Jesus.

(SABURO *goes out quickly, and brother and little sister are left regarding each other with shining eyes*)

TSURUKO: Oh, I am so happy, Takeshi! (*Putting puzzled little hands to her eyes*) And yet—yet my eyes are wet.

TAKESHI: They are happy tears, little sister. May they always be thus. And I—at first I was so sad—even when I was up at the mission with Dr. Kenyon, after supper, I was not happy, as now; though of course it was a great privilege to talk thus with him. But now—why, suddenly, it has got all right.

TSURUKO (*With abrupt cheerfulness*) Maybe it 's all a mistake about the old 'Sclusion. Maybe that 's why you 're happy.

TAKESHI (*With a little smile*) No, Tsuruko, the Exclusion Clause is a fact and a very sad fact. Poor grandfather's right about that. But the wonderful thing is, now I feel I can fight it in the right way, not with fear and hate, but with *love*. That 's the only weapon worth talking about.

TSURUKO (*With a little puzzled frown*) What is "weapon"?

TAKESHI: Why, you know! (*Casting about for words, he suddenly perceives the sword in the alcove, pointing to it with quick enthusiasm*) That—the sword of the *samurai*—it 's been in our family six hundred years. Our sword 's a weapon!

TSURUKO (*Increasingly bewildered*) Well, that's what I thought! But *love*—you said *love* was the only weapon worth talking about.

TAKESHI (*Smiling*) Ah, and so it is, Tsuruko. Love—the sword of the spirit! A two-edged sword when it comes to getting things done! (*Then, going to the door, rear, in response to a slight noise*) Oh, if only I could make grandfather understand! (*Then, as* YURIKO *enters, greeting her joyfully*) Yuriko! You 've come back!

YURIKO (*Obviously glad to be with him, she yet looks pale and anxious*) Yes, yes, I had to, Takeshi. I was so frightened! (*Throwing a smile to the little girl*) Good evening, Tsuruko, I thought you would be asleep.

TSURUKO (*Somewhat defiantly*) That 's what Brother Takeshi said. Well, I 'm not.

TAKESHI (*Persuasively*) Hush, Tsuruko; don't you want to play in the garden?

TSURUKO (*Smiling again*) Oh, all right! I'll take the dishes, too. (*Gathering the dishes* SABURO *has used upon a tray*) It was a nice party. And then I 'll teach a poem to my *matsumushi* —a poem about love.

YURIKO (*Laughing, as* TSURUKO *runs out, and they seat themselves on cushions*) What on earth does she mean?

TAKESHI (*With sudden gravity*) I was talking to her about love.

YURIKO (*Starting*) To Tsuruko? But she 's such a little thing—to think about love!

TAKESHI: Not for that kind of love, Yuriko. Ah, if you 'd heard her talking to the poor fisherman to-night! You know, there are all kinds of love.

YURIKO (*Softly*) There is that love I learned with you, Takeshi.

TAKESHI (*Deeply moved, his voice caressing her*) And I with you, Yuriko. That moonlight night, beneath the cherry-blossoms!

YURIKO: Ah, Takeshi, it seems so far away! The scent of those cherry-blossoms— (*Softly leaning forward, her eyes far away*) And yet—I can almost see them, Takeshi—and the fragrance—oh, Takeshi! "Cloud-wrack to the moon—wind to flowers—" How happy we were!

TAKESHI: And we shall be happy again, Yuriko.

YURIKO (*After a moment*) But there is another love, as you say. Takeshi! I have been thinking of it to-night. And when I heard the talk of hatred for this wrong which has been done our people by those whom we loved and trusted, I thought in my heart: "This is a kind of *test* of whether we Christian Japanese are truly Christian. To forgive what we feel to be a wrong against us!" I was thinking of this all the time we ate supper. None of us could really eat. Never had the chicken

and dried fish seemed so tasteless. The *okashi* almost choked me. And my honorable mother was half choked with tears.

TAKESHI: She loved America so much?

YURIKO: Surely! And she still loves it. Did it not give her what she holds most dear, the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ? And now my father says my mother may no longer go to see Miss Sargent at the mission.

TAKESHI: But Miss Sargent has done nothing wrong.

YURIKO: I know; but she is American, and America has hurt my father in his pride very much indeed. I am lucky to be allowed here myself. You see, Takeshi, America is the country he loved best, after Nippon. Like your grandfather.

TAKESHI (*Deeply troubled*) Yes, my grandfather is terribly hurt. I have never seen him like this before. Oh, Yuriko, I wish I could do something to ease his pain.

YURIKO (*With some hesitation*) He wishes you to enter the Imperial Service.

TAKESHI (*Starting up restively*) I know. And he has been so kind! He himself has taken all the trouble to secure the commission after I spoke to him about it. (*Feeling the question in her eyes*) You see, I guess I didn't think much about it —not at first, anyway. It did n't seem wrong then—any more than it did when I rendered Conscript Service in the regular course, but now—it is as if my ears were tuned more delicately —I don't know how to explain it, Yuriko—but as if that new internationalism that is surely in the world were at last finding a way to make us hear—to make me hear. And I feel—I feel as if it were perhaps *His* very voice. (*He breaks off, looking nervously toward the door, as a step is heard*) Hush, that must be my grandfather now.

YURIKO (*Swiftly*) It is a terrible thing to disappoint one's parents, Takeshi, but if you find you must, you may count on me, whatever happens.

TAKESHI (*In a quick undertone, as the doors open and* MASAKIYO SAITO *enters*) Thank you. (*Then, bowing deeply, as does* YURIKO) Good evening, honorable grandfather.

(*For a moment* MASAKIYO SAITO *does not speak, perhaps absorbed in his effort to thwart with his indomitable pride, the frail old age which threatens to bow the erect form. Hurt with a mortal wound, he holds his grief rigidly in check. Then, as he sees* TAKESHI *regarding him with loving anxiety, though his impassive face is still a mask, he forces himself to speak, calmly, as always*)

MASAKIYO (*Bowing formally*) Good evening, Takeshi. I am glad you have returned. I wish to speak with you.

TAKESHI: Yes, grandfather. (*Then, indicating* YURIKO *as* MASAKIYO *slowly seats himself on a cushion, R*) Yuriko is with us, grandfather.

MASAKIYO (*Bowing to* YURIKO *with a faintly distant courtesy*) I did not see Yuriko San. Pray excuse.

YURIKO (*Bowing deeply, and then moving toward the door*) I was just going, *ojii san.*

MASAKIYO (*Staying her with a gesture*) Strange to see you, Yuriko.

TAKESHI: Why, Yuriko is often here, grandfather.

MASAKIYO: Yes, yes. But it is strange, nevertheless. She is of the present, and the future; and to-night— (*Passing a hand before his tired eyes*) and to-night it seems only the past that is real. Yes, it is strange.

TAKESHI (*With faint anxiety*) But, grandfather—we are betrothed to be married. Dr. Kenyon arranged all that—you know, after he had attended both our families in illness, and made us well. You remember! And besides, Yuriko comes to see her teacher at the mission, the honorable Miss Helen Sargent.

MASAKIYO: I know, Takeshi—and that, too, is strange. An American within our gates, when America closes hers against us.

TAKESHI (*With swift urgency*) Please, grandfather, I beg you——

MASAKIYO: I know. You do not like me to speak of that. Well, I will not speak of it again. Only, how well he knew, my honorable father, what it would come to, if once we admitted Admiral Perry to our Yeddo.

YURIKO (*Gently, at his gesture, she has again resumed her seat on the cushion, L*) You yourself saw him, did you not, honorable sir?

MASAKIYO (*His eyes full of memories*) Ah, yes, I saw him! I saw him with my own eyes. Eyes that have seen so much—*too* much! (*Turning to* TAKESHI *with his stern, repressed affection*) I was younger than you, boy. About the age of our Tsuruko. It seems like yesterday that afternoon he came. (*He is silent; then, in a low voice*) Yesterday and to-day—there is nothing between. (*Again addressing them both*) My father wanted to use that sword against him— (*Pointing to the sword in the alcove*) that sword yonder, Yuriko, Takeshi. He was weary of the foreigners. For years they had come, knocking on our gates, and those from America were the most determined of them all. They said they bore us friendship and good will! But my father wanted none of it. For years, in common with the rest, he had bidden them begone to their own shores. Nippon was happy as she was, ruled by the great *shoguns,* the mighty Tokugawa. And still Admiral Perry came and still my father felt the same. But I—I knew better than my father. The young always know better, do they not, my children? (*For a moment, as they do not speak, he regards them with a smile, half stern, half wistful; then, with a sigh*) I was a boy —full of a boy's dream—and this man beyond the seas, neither Emperor nor *shogun*—what was he? A *samurai,* perhaps, in his own land. How did I know? And I wanted to know. I wanted to know what was there beyond, in the land that built the black ships. And where was that land? A curious land—neither Europe nor ancient China. For days I thought of this, and for days the black ships that had sailed so far for friendship and good will lay there at anchor in our harbor. And that

strange man, their commander, how could I find a way to see him? And at last, one night, it was in July—one and seventy long years ago—he came ashore—Admiral Perry. There were great crowds, and great rejoicings; he had made my people feel it was a happy thing for them, this friendship with America. And I, a little lad, I was there. At first he did not see me, lost in the crowds of people. But I forced my way nearer and nearer, until at last I stood quite close. And then, suddenly he saw me—down there beneath him—and he put his hand on my head, and said, "Hello!" It sounded beautiful to me. And I said, *"Yoku oide nasai mashita,"* which in his tongue is "Welcome." I said "Welcome" to Admiral Perry. And to-night——

(*Abruptly he is silent, past and present surging tumultuously upon him.* YURIKO *and* TAKESHI, *silent, too, regard him and then each other; presently, his emotion held in the taut leash of his control, he turns to the young girl*)

Yuriko—I am old—old like Japan. You and Takeshi are young. I will ask you a question.

YURIKO (*In a low voice*) I beg you ask, *ojii sama,* Masakiyo Saito.

MASAKIYO (*With a deep solemnity that is like a prayer*) Yuriko San, will you who are young, in this old land, Japan, make my grandson Takeshi a good wife, that our ancestors may have no cause for shame?

YURIKO (*Solemnly, she is deeply moved*) I love your grandson.

MASAKIYO (*Almost sternly*) You have heard my question, Yuriko San!

YURIKO (*With deep earnestness, though her voice quivers*) I will make your grandson a good wife, God helping me.

MASAKIYO: When you say God helping you, you mean the Christian God, do you not?

YURIKO: Yes, *ojii sama;* the Christian God, the God of Love.

MASAKIYO (*With impassivity that cannot conceal the smoldering fires*) Admiral Perry was a Christian. These men that have closed the gates of America against us are Christian. I regret —I regret with my whole heart——

TAKESHI (*Springing up in passionate appeal*) Grandfather! Forgive me for interrupting you—but I beg you—I implore you—wait! Do not say those words! Let me try to tell you. There are Christian people that are wrong, just as there are Buddhists that are wrong. Do not hold it against the religion of Jesus Christ.

MASAKIYO (*His impassivity threatened by a growing fear*) Strange to hear you speak so, Takeshi—you, the head of our house.

TAKESHI (*In a low voice, charged with deep, repressed emotion*) Grandfather, not because I am the head of our house do I presume to say these things, but for love alone.

MASAKIYO: Love of Yuriko San, this Christian woman whom you will make your wife?

TAKESHI: Not only for her, grandfather; for *you.*

(*For a moment longer,* YURIKO, *who has been listening in a gentle suspense, hesitates, looking from one to the other. Then she bows, rising softly*)

YURIKO: *Ojii sama* Masakiyo Saito, and you, Takeshi, I pray you, a little while excuse me. I would go into the garden.

MASAKIYO (*Regarding her with wistful detachment, his voice tinged with sadness*) As you will, Yuriko San. The moon is beautiful to-night. It hangs like silver about the maples and the cryptomerias, and the air is sweet with spring. Yet autumn will come—and after autumn chill winter. Our poet was right when he said, "There is no shore to the bitter sea of Death and Birth." (*Then, with a certain effort, as she goes toward the door, rear*) I thank you that you leave me with my grandson. I have things to say—many things, Yuriko, after this long life that is nearly ended now—this life that blows like a lamp-flame before the wind.

TAKESHI (*Softly, as* YURIKO *slips quietly out, putting on her clogs at the entrance of the further room*) I thank you, Yuriko.

(*For a moment, as they are alone, the old man is silent; then, gently*)

MASAKIYO: Takeshi, my son's son, I would not try to sway you for selfish ends. You know that.

TAKESHI: Indeed, grandfather, I know.

MASAKIYO: But this which I ask of you I ask for Japan, our country, the land of our ancestors. Those illustrious dead who, shaping our past, shaped ever, for such is the law, our future.

TAKESHI (*With a growing uneasiness*) They were great men, indeed.

MASAKIYO (*A growing and solemn sternness upon him*) I wonder if you know how great. For hundreds of years they made Japan. Thanks to them, she, and she alone among the peoples of the East, has retained her glory, the shining blossom of her independence. And she has done it—how? By isolation, by loneliness. By stern reliance on her strength and her strength alone. For three hundred years this was known of the Tokugawas. For three hundred years they kept the foreigner away. The Dutch and Portuguese did not greatly matter; I do not speak of them, and their little treaties, though even there there was intrigue. But the English we kept from us—the English, strange power of the West—a people on an island but slightly larger than our own—a people with the sea all about them, yet always lured by the sea. A people who must sail every ocean, to all strange lands, and conquer them, and bring them under the power of that same little English isle. For long years the English did not come to Nippon. But one day their descendants came. They came from America. With land ten thousand times the size of ours, they could not keep at home, but came sailing, sailing; for in their blood, too, was the sea, wild and restless, urging them onward. The sea which had made their fathers, three centuries ago, sail until they found America, and made it theirs. Men who civilized and killed, and made Christian and cast out, all the strange inhabitants of the land, because they were not white.

TAKESHI: Do you mean the Indians, grandfather?

MASAKIYO: Surely. Indians! Have I not read a book? It called these Indians red—I know not what manner of man that could

be. And the same book called others brown, and some black, and us— (*Again the smoldering fires in the voice*) us it called *yellow!*

TAKESHI (*Moved by the pain in the old, bitter voice*) Ah, grandfather, grandfather, I feared it would come back to that. It is this bitter wound to-day. I know.

MASAKIYO: You are too young to know.

TAKESHI: But this law may be changed. Can you not hope, grandfather; can you not have faith and hope in America? You who have seen so much?

MASAKIYO (*With all his years upon him*) It is *because* I have seen so much. It is *because* I have had so much faith and hope that to-night—to-night I am full of despair. And for the first time, Takeshi, I rejoice that the Emperor Meiji, the Great Enlightenment, is with his ancestors. For many years I have mourned him, but to-night I have only envy. For he died when all was well with his country; and that is well. He died when all men, and the Japanese themselves, were praising him for the great changes, the miraculous speed with which Japan had grappled with the future and made it one with her past. Think, Takeshi, you who think change is good, what that change meant. The great unification, at the time of the Charter Oath, five and thirty years ago, when our nobles surrendered their feudal holdings, and all became one in Nippon! (*He is briefly silent, remembering*) And the Emperor Meiji saw it all—the work of a dozen generations crowded into one! The modern evolution of Japan compressed into the span of his one life!

TAKESHI: Yes, it was then Japan became one with the nations of the West.

MASAKIYO: Say not *with* the West, Takeshi!

TAKESHI: I beg you, grandfather, say not *against* the West!

MASAKIYO: I mean only this, Takeshi, that now she has stepped into this modern life, for good or ill, there is for her no turning back. She must maintain her place. Great men and true

must serve the Emperor, as Nogi served the Great Enlightenment. (*After a moment, a deep emotion in the low-pitched voice*) No wonder that when great Meiji died, General Nogi and his wife themselves went with him, ready to serve him in the Light Eternal.

TAKESHI (*With a certain awe*) Do you mean when they committed *hara-kiri?*

MASAKIYO: Yes, *hara-kiri.* (*He is silent again; then, regarding the young face strangely*) You may thank the Amida Butsu, Takeshi, there are even to-day men who know when it is well to die.

TAKESHI (*Startled by something in face and voice*) Grandfather! Has something happened? Something *more?*

MASAKIYO (*Very gently, something of the intense affection he feels breaking through the quiet voice*) This one thing I ask you to do for me, Takeshi: accept the commission I have brought you.

TAKESHI (*Hesitantly*) There are Christians in the Emperor's service. A few—it is not for me to judge. I say nothing against them—it is for them to judge; but I—I cannot make it seem right. I want my aviation—I have dreamed great dreams—far voyages, there in the air, where the great voyages are yet to be made. But there was nothing of war in my mind when I flew. And now—in a military service— (*He breaks off, deeply troubled; then, almost pleadingly*) Grandfather—to me it seems naught but hypocrisy to accept *His* Gospel of Love, and then, if there should be war——

MASAKIYO (*With cold impassivity*) Do you really think, Takeshi, that Japan could make greater wars than the Christians have made?

TAKESHI (*Flushing*) I know. But there is to-day a new spirit—a quickening coming upon Christendom. Men are thinking new thoughts—or rather, they are seeing meaning in very old —"blessed are the peacemakers"—"love your enemies." Words he spoke once, long ago, on a mountain-top—the Lord Christ.

MASAKIYO (*With a curious anxiety*) But you are not a Christian —not yet? You are not yet—what is it they say?—baptized into their church?

TAKESHI (*In a low voice*) Not yet, grandfather. But I feel this quickening—and you know our code—*Bushido*. *He*, too, said it: "No man can serve two masters."

MASAKIYO: Oh, full of wisdom and folly! To think I would have you serve aught but the Emperor! O Takeshi, when I think what your loyalty is, once given! And it was I who taught you, as a child, your father being dead. And now you seem as if you would withhold it. Now—to-day of all days—when America has shown us how she despises us. We who have tried to be like her. Copied her ways, as we could, like so many monkeys, factories and schools, and moving pictures, and churches, foreign music and foreign dress and foreign ways, until scarce have we the semblance of ourselves left us! And now you threaten me with this new religion! O Takeshi, I beg you, I implore you, do all else as you will, but do not accept the God of America!

TAKESHI (*Passionately*) Call Him not the God of America alone. He is the boundless God of a Love wide and deep as the sea, a Love that went down into Death itself——

MASAKIYO (*Silencing him with a solemn, protesting hand*) Death! You speak of death? We Japanese can die, Takeshi!

(TAKESHI *is regarding him with a startled look when the door, rear, is swiftly opened, and* HELEN *enters. Abruptly she pauses, automatically shuffling off her outer shoes, and changing into the low house-slippers; then she comes swiftly on. She is pale and tensely agitated. At sight of the old man, again she pauses; then comes forward slowly, her hands outstretched in supplication. Though she sees* TAKESHI, *her whole concern is for* MASAKIYO. *As she speaks, there is in her voice a mingled pity and pleading, as for herself and him, caught in a common tragedy*)

HELEN: Masakiyo Saito, there is something—something has occurred. (*As the old man merely bows with his grave impassivity, urgently*) Masakiyo Saito, may I speak with you, please?

MASAKIYO: I beg you to speak, Miss Sargent. (*Motioning* TAKESHI, *who has been watching her with a deepening sense of alarm, to give her the chair near the alcove*) Will you not be seated?

HELEN (*Sinking down upon the chair, almost unconsciously*) I do not know how to tell you. It is difficult to speak—now—and it has been so easy. I feel as if already that gulf that evil tongues have tried to put between us is widening, deepening. And now, I fear when you know——

MASAKIYO (*Calmly, as the unsteady voice breaks off*) When I know what, Miss Sargent?

TAKESHI: Has something frightened you, Miss Sargent? Some unkind person in the street spoken against you? I have been here within, some time past, and before that, in the quiet Mission Hall, with Dr. Kenyon.

HELEN (*Seizing on the dear name as if for support*) But Dr. Kenyon knows now. I have just seen him. He is there below, with the crowds on Ginza Street. They are growing every moment —they will grow all night— (*With increasing nervousness*) Oh, I wish he were here! I—I am a strange messenger. (*Then, as the great gong of the temple clangs against the silence*) Hark! The bell of the Entsu Temple! Perhaps it will speak to you with less strange a tongue than I! I, a foreigner, here in Tokyo, this terrible strange night when my country has insulted yours, and when— (*Her voice thrilling between horror and exultation*) when a Japanese has offered sacrifice!

TAKESHI (*Regarding her with bewilderment*) What is that you say —sacrifice?

HELEN (*In a swift torrent*) Yes, yes, I call it sacrifice! He meant it so. *Hara-kiri!* (*Facing the impassive old man who is regarding her curiously*) Masakiyo Saito, a man has killed himself to-night for the honor of Japan.

MASAKIYO (*Still, with that external calm, as* TAKESHI *starts hurriedly for the door*) Takeshi—wait! We will learn more of this from Miss Sargent.

TAKESHI: But how strange in my lifetime! Grandfather! It is as if the old days, that you were telling me of but a moment since, were alive again. The Forty-seven Ronin! The sword of the *samurai!* Grandfather! (*His voice low and full of awe*) It is the past that is alive again.

MASAKIYO: It is always the past that is alive in Japan. She seems whirling, whirling; but at heart she does not change. Ever, deep within, at her heart's core, dwells honor.

HELEN: Masakiyo Saito, I believe you knew of this already.

MASAKIYO: I knew.

TAKESHI (*Turning to* HELEN) But I know nothing. Miss Sargent —you are so white and strange! I have never seen you like this before—not even after the earthquake. You look as if you had something to do with it.

HELEN: Indeed I think I have. It was for my country's sin he died. (*Low, rather to herself than them*) For I think it *was* sin—this harsh closing of the doors—this arrogance that would not wait.

TAKESHI: Do you mean a man has committed *hara-kiri* because of the Exclusion Clause?

HELEN: I do.

TAKESHI: Who was it? His name?

HELEN: That, too, is strange; they do not know his name. "A Nameless Subject" he called himself. He left a letter; Ambassador Woods was to convey it to America.

TAKESHI: What does it say?

HELEN: I don't know all—the police have it—but it is passing, swiftly, from mouth to mouth. Already it has become history. The thing I remember best—he says— (*Trying to control her trembling voice*) "After my death I will ask the reconciliation by the people of your country"—he means America—"by Jesus

Christ, and pray for the greater happiness of your people"—he means my people. And he says he prefers death rather than to feel resentment.

MASAKIYO (*After a long moment*) He was Buddhist, was he not?

HELEN: Yes, Buddhist. It is but two hours since he killed himself, and already they are saying there will be a great burial in Aoyama, and a commemorative service in Entsu Temple, and the people are begging leave to sit beside the body; but they were saying as I came here, just now, that the police themselves would hold that post.

TAKESHI: I will go with them. Grandfather, will you come? Or rather, rest here; you must be very weary.

MASAKIYO: I shall have strength to do what I must do, Takeshi. (*Then, very simply*) I will meditate. Not for him alone will I pray; for myself, too, and for my country, that we may feel his glorious deed, that his strength may come close, for now indeed he has strength, being free of the Great Illusion, and being dead, enters into life.

TAKESHI (*Hesitantly, as the old man moves slowly toward the sacred alcove*) May I stay with you, grandfather?

MASAKIYO: You may stay.

(*For the past moments,* HELEN *has been watching* MASAKIYO *with an increasing yearning. Now as, approaching the alcove, he comes near her, always with his austere detachment, she puts out a supplicating hand*)

HELEN: Masakiyo Saito, you will think me strange to ask, but may I, too, stay and pray?

MASAKIYO (*Gravely*) Why would you stay, *ojō san?* It is the custom to pray alone. Why would you stay?

HELEN: I would stay because on this night of Japan's sorrow, I, whose country have made it, would share her grief. And this man who is dead—this Nameless Subject—he died with a message to my people. (*As he still hesitates*) Honorable sir, I need to be near you. I pray you, do not cast me out.

MASAKIYO (*After a moment*) You may stay, *ojō san.*

(*Bowing assent,* HELEN *rises and crosses to the other side of the room, where, sitting down, she covers her face with her hands.* MASAKIYO, *first lighting the tapers and the incense, now opens the doors of the Buddhist shrine, the golden Buddha within gleaming strangely beautiful in the soft candle-light. Then, stepping back several paces,* MASAKIYO *kneels upon the mats, his back erect, the Buddhist rosary he has drawn from about the shrine wrapped round his hands, whose palms lightly touch each other.* TAKESHI, *too, at a little distance from him, has knelt. For a moment there is silence. Then, at first almost inaudibly, rising to a gradual crescendo, comes the low*)

Namu Amida Butsu! Namu Amida Butsu! Namu Amida Butsu!

(*Then, after a moment, the low voice throbbing with a strange new beauty*)

Hail thou, Amida Buddha, Lord of the Western Paradise, who savest all who call on thee in faith! Hail and all thanks unto thee for him who, entering that country, enters likewise that state of bliss from which there can be no turning back. The Text of Gold proclaims, "In that country they receive bliss only; therefore that world is called Gokuraku—exceeding bliss."

(*Again, almost inaudibly*)

Namu Amida Butsu! Namu Amida Butsu! Namu Amida Butsu!

(*Then, to himself with quiet pauses for deeper meditation, and always a sense of oneness with the beautiful rhythms of the words*)

Though indeed that bliss itself is unreal, beside that ultimate repose, which is in thee; for the Absolute, the Supreme Buddha, is the only Reality. The Blue Mountain of itself remains eternally unmoved; the White Clouds come of themselves and go. Wherefore Birth and Death and Nirvana have become for me as a dream of the night that is gone. *Namu Amida Butsu!*

This man, too, for love of country, by virtue of his exceeding holy patriotism, shall enter into thee. For grass, trees, flowers, countries, the earth itself—all—all—shall enter wholly into Buddha.

(*And again, charged with the mystic ecstasy*)

Namu Amida Butsu! Namu Amida Butsu! Namu Amida Butsu!

(*There is a silence, broken presently by the soft opening of the door, and* TSURUKO, *curiously still, her hands full of flowers—lotus, iris, and wistaria—stands looking in. Then, as no one moves*)

TSURUKO (*Very softly*) Grandfather!

TAKESHI (*Softly, motioning her away*) Hush, Tsuruko! Grandfather is at prayer.

TSURUKO (*As before, a sweet and gentle gravity is upon her*) I know. But I bring flowers—flowers for the dead.

(*Again there is a little silence; then the old man rises slowly from his knees, and goes to her, gravely receiving from her hands the flowers*)

MASAKIYO: It is well. (*He motions her to a cushion near* TAKESHI, *where she seats herself quietly. Then he stands a moment, looking down at the flowers in his hands. Then*) Lotus, pure symbol of life beyond death, flower of the Lord Amida Buddha! Iris and wistaria! (*Turning to* TAKESHI) Will you place these flowers with me, Takeshi, about the shrine, and the kindled incense? The last flower arrangement for the dead?

(TAKESHI *rises and starts toward the alcove. His eyes have sought* HELEN'S *in a half-unconscious supplication*)

TAKESHI: I will place the flowers for the dead.

MASAKIYO (*Now regarding him intently*) And will you say with me a prayer?

TAKESHI (*Low, but with a thrilling resonance*) To the Lord Jesus I will pray.

MASAKIYO (*As if already he knew the answer*) You will not pray to the Lord Amida Buddha?

TAKESHI (*As before*) I cannot pray to him.

MASAKIYO (*Heavily, as if again stating a fact*) And you will not enter the service of the Emperor, Takeshi Saito?

TAKESHI (*A tragic finality in voice and face*) Grandfather, I cannot.

MASAKIYO (*In last appeal*) I ask in the name of your ancestors.

TAKESHI: It is the same. I cannot.

(*There is a silence almost sharp in its intensity.* HELEN, *who throughout much of the foregoing has been lost in meditation, has been for the past moments listening intently, conscious, Westerner as she is, of something of the mighty struggle taking place in the quiet room. Like little* TSURUKO, HELEN *is very still. As she looks toward* MASAKIYO, *there is pity in her face; but as her eyes now find* TAKESHI'S, *a yearning hope softly kindles. A moment passes; and another. Then, with tragic dignity,* MASAKIYO, *the memorial flowers in his hands, goes slowly toward the alcove*)

MASAKIYO: You need not place the flowers, Takeshi Saito. I think he would have none do him this last honor but they who hold his Nippon dear.

TAKESHI (*Deeply moved*) I *do* hold Nippon dear.

(*Without response,* MASAKIYO *places the flowers with reverent care before the shrine.* TAKESHI, *after waiting a moment more, turns slowly toward the door, his eyes fixed in yearning love upon the aged, implacable figure before the alcove*)

TAKESHI (*Very low*) Grandfather—I will go now.

MASAKIYO (*Turning slowly, a deep reproach in his eyes*) As you will.

(TAKESHI, *head bent, goes out. For a moment there is silence; then, as if realizing her uncertainty,* MASAKIYO *turns to* HELEN *with grave but always courteous finality*)

MASAKIYO: *Ojō san,* I would be alone.

HELEN (*Rising swiftly*) Honorable sir, I will go.

(*She goes to the door, rear, gesturing to* TSURUKO, *who has remained throughout in awed and perfect stillness, to go out before her. With a bow which* MASAKIYO *is too preoccupied to notice,* TSURUKO *goes. For a moment longer,* HELEN *lingers, wistful eyes on the old man; she looks as if she would speak; but presently, conscious of the futility or even unkindness of words, she, too, goes out, gently closing the doors after her. Conscious that he is at last alone,* MASAKIYO *steps back some paces from the shrine, surveying the sacred objects, the veneration of a lifetime in his eyes. At last, with a great love, his eyes raise themselves to the sword, in the* tokonoma. *Then, low, to himself*)

MASAKIYO: I am alone now. And it is well. *He* does not understand, he, the son of our house. He is gone. But you—(*His hand pointing to the sword, the low voice rising in exultation*) *You* understand, perhaps, you sword of the *samurai,* who have hung within the sacred alcove since the last great days. *You* understand. I shall not be alone with you again in my hand. Ah, yes! (*With gathering, repressed excitement*) I must hold you once again before I go to my ancestors! (*Again drawing close to the alcove, with reverent care his frail hand reaches for the sword and grasps it; then, stepping back, the sword in his hand*) *You* understand. The deed that was done with the dagger of the Nameless Subject. You, symbol of our Shinto faith, our love of country! (*Breaking off, he slowly and carefully spreads the sword before him on the mats, then, continuing, always with that reverence that seems to come from his very soul*) Japan is in you, sword of the *samurai.* (*Then, the old hand hovering about the sword*) Therefore, thus, thus, from your lacquered sheath, red like my heart's blood, thus from the ancient dragons that guard you, do I draw you forth —naked—once more! (*He leans forward, and taking the sword*

from its sheath, with a long, almost ecstatic breath, he regards it with deepest love and veneration) I look upon you, sword of my ancestors. Stainless, because deep stained with the blood of our enemies. Stainless, because ever ready to receive our own blood, when we flee dishonor. I hold you in my heart, my sword. (*For a moment he is still; then, with the sword spread naked before him*) There is always *that*—the shining refuge from dishonor—*death*. Even for me, aged and helpless as I am, that same bright refuge waits, brightly as of old it waited for the Forty-seven Ronin. And I shall take it—death! There is no other way. The foreigner may speak against it—against our *hara-kiri*—but often, deep in his heart, he confesses its power, its beauty. And even if he did not, what is the foreigner to me? Is it not because of the foreigner I die, because of his scorn, which, even as the Nameless Subject, I am powerless to remove, being alive? It is only by being dead I shall attain honor. The Nameless Subject has shown me the way—and General Nogi—after the glory of the mighty combat with the great white Czar, when we fought with Western weapons, and conquered, and sent the Russian fleet to the depths of ocean. Yes, General Nogi understood. And therefore I shall die to-night. (*He is silent, gazing upon the sword*) Or now, perhaps? No, there are the ceremonies. I must wait. And besides, I would go first and kneel beside his body—the body of the Nameless Subject. (*He rises slowly, the sword in his hand*) After that I shall return. And I shall avenge my honor, I, the last of the *samurai*. (*Thrillingly, regarding the sword in his hand with an intense love*) You sword, faithful to Japan! Stainless sword, faithful to *Bushido!* (*Reverently replacing it in the alcove*) Sword of the *samurai,* faithful unto death, await me!

(*After a brief prostration before the shrine,* MASAKIYO *goes out, rear, resuming his clogs at the entrance of the further room. For a moment the living-room is empty; then, from R rear comes the sound of* TSURUKO'S *voice, and her mother's. Presently the door opens and they enter*)

MRS. SAITO (*In some dismay*) Why, Tsuruko! I thought you said honorable grandfather was here.

TSURUKO: He was, *okaa san,* a few minutes ago.

MRS. SAITO: I fear he has gone out again. (*With a sigh*) Ah, what a strange night, Tsuruko! I have never seen one like it.

TSURUKO: It 's awfully exciting!

MRS. SAITO: You are too small to understand, Tsuruko. (*Then, with sudden maternal vigor*) And you should have been asleep under your quilt long since.

TSURUKO (*Stifling a yawn*) I 'm not a bit sleepy.

MRS. SAITO (*Again preoccupied*) Ever since supper I have been with our neighbors. They do not understand, either. It seems so strange that a law passed in America, thousands of miles away, should make any one commit *hara-kiri* in Japan.

TSURUKO (*Philosophically*) We are all one, honorable mother. When we had the earthquake, did they not raise money there? Why, I saw them myself. They took up collections right in church.

MRS. SAITO: You are talking too much, Tsuruko. You must go to sleep.

TSURUKO (*Starting reluctantly for the door*) But I 'm *not* sleepy. (*On a happy thought, she pauses abruptly*) Pardon, *okaa san,* but, please, can't I go to church to-night when Brother Takeshi is baptized?

MRS. SAITO (*Uncertainly*) But it will not be to-night. How can it? After all that has happened. And it is growing late. Besides, he has not yet made up his mind.

TSURUKO: Pardon, honorable mother, but Yuriko San thinks he has. We talked in the garden—she and I—oh, a long time! It was Yuriko San told me about the Nameless Subject—so that I could bring flowers— (*With some pride, pointing to the flowers about the shrine*) See, those are my flowers. Honorable grandfather accepted them.

MRS. SAITO (*With some constraint*) That was well, my child.

TSURUKO: And Yuriko San says they will have the service in the church to-night, only it will be later, because of everything! Oh, mother, is n't Takeshi going? Yuriko San is there already, waiting for him to take his vows! *Won't* he go?

MRS. SAITO (*With the same constraint*) I do not know, Tsuruko. It will hurt honorable grandfather, all this. I do not understand. For a thousand years life was simple in Japan. Now it is very difficult.

TSURUKO (*With an irrepressible little laugh*) I think I like it best this way. (*Then, at a sudden commotion outside*) Hark, mother, what is that? Oooo! (*As the sound of steps and voices continues*) Ooo! It 's exciting!

(*Heedless of her mother's warning gesture, she has run to the door, rear, folded it swiftly back, when the outer door, L rear, is hurriedly opened, and* TAKESHI *and* HELEN *enter, guiding, half supporting between them,* MASAKIYO SAITO)

MRS. SAITO (*In a suppressed cry*) Oh!

TSURUKO (*Excitedly*) Grandfather!

(MASAKIYO'S *eyes are closed, and his face is very white, his clothing disarranged, as after a struggle.* HELEN, *pale and quivering, her self-control almost gone, is sobbing low and convulsively, even as she helps* TAKESHI *gently lower* MASAKIYO *into a chair, R. As she touches him, there is in every gesture a new gratitude and love*)

HELEN (*Unsteadily, helping* TAKESHI *dispose him comfortably*) It was for *me.* He—he—did it for *me.*

TAKESHI (*Gently, as she breaks off with a little agonized cry*) Hush, hush, Miss Sargent! (*Then, turning to* MRS. SAITO) Mother, some water, please.

MRS. SAITO (*Going out obediently*) But what *is* it?

TSURUKO: What *is* it? Takeshi! Miss Sargent! Why does honorable grandfather keep his eyes shut?

HELEN (*Brokenly, as* MRS. SAITO *reënters with water, which* TAKESHI *holds to* MASAKIYO'S *lips*) He—he saved my life. (*Again sharply overcome*) Oh, I can't *bear* it. I can't! (*Then, as the door is abruptly opened, and* KENYON *rushes in, she runs to him, flinging herself into his arms in a passionate sobbing*) David! David!

KENYON (*Soothing her for a swift moment*) My darling! They told me— Are you safe?

HELEN (*Pushing him from her, to* MASAKIYO) Yes, yes! It 's he! Oh, David! Save *him*!

(*Already wholly the doctor,* KENYON *is bending over* MASAKIYO. *Presently he takes a small phial from his pocket and pours a few drops between* MASAKIYO'S *lips*)

TAKESHI (*Tensely watching him*) Is it serious, Dr. Kenyon?

KENYON (*His fingers on the fluttering pulse, making his swift examination*) The weapon scarcely touched him, but——

MRS. SAITO (*Starting violently*) *Weapon?* Oh, will you not tell us?

TAKESHI (*As* KENYON *again bends over* MASAKIYO) It was a man in the crowd, mother—drunk with *sake*—he had been hearing wild talk—Miss Sargent was on her way to the church—and grandfather—grandfather must have been going to the bier of the Nameless Subject—the paths cross—there was a crowd——

HELEN (*Looking up quickly from her post beside* MASAKIYO) I was conscious of nothing strange, and then suddenly, a Japanese—Takeshi has told you he was very drunk—he—he lunged at me—I caught the gleam of the knife in my eyes. I could n't think! He cried, "Down with the foreigners!" And then—suddenly—*he* was there—Masakiyo Saito—*he* stepped between. He got the wound that was meant for me. At the risk of his own life he saved me—his enemy. (*Then, with a cry of relief, as* MASAKIYO *opens his eyes*) *Oh!*

MASAKIYO (*His eyes on* HELEN, *who is kneeling at his feet, slowly, but very distinctly*) *Not* enemy!

TAKESHI (*Urgently*) Grandfather! You speak! What is that you say?

MASAKIYO (*His eyes going from* HELEN *to* TAKESHI *in a look of immense relief*) *Not* enemy! Enemy no longer. (*Then, as* TAKESHI *comes close, oblivious of* KENYON'S *warning gesture*) Listen, Takeshi. I learned to-night—I, an old man—I—I must tell you——

KENYON: Honorable sir, you are very weak. I pray you, rest.

MASAKIYO (*With a faint smile*) Soon, I shall rest. (*Then, a feeble hand pointing to the sword in the alcove*) The Nameless Subject—I—I meditated with the sword——

TAKESHI: I understand!

MASAKIYO: It seemed to me, *hara-kiri* was the only way.

TAKESHI (*Starting*) *Grandfather!*

MRS. SAITO (*Under her breath*) Honorable father-in-law!

HELEN (*Softly*) True *samurai!*

MASAKIYO (*Catching the word, and turning to her*) You know—the sword of the *samurai!* (*Then, conquering his weakness*) I—I wished for a noble vengeance—like our Ungo-Zenji—that is the best! But it is not for all. It seemed impossible. There was no time—no way. Only this one way—*hara-kiri!*

TAKESHI (*As the old man pauses*) You were thinking of that, and going to the bier of the Nameless Subject, when you saw Miss Sargent?

MASAKIYO: Yes.

HELEN (*With a quick breath*) He was just in time—the dagger——

MASAKIYO (*Raising his hand, as again he turns to* TAKESHI) But this—the point is this, Takeshi: I saved her first, I thought, for the honor of Japan. I did not see who it was. I saw only it was an American. I saved her for the honor of Japan, because——

TAKESHI (*Again helping the worn voice*) Because we could not have our enemy hurt within our gates?

MASAKIYO: Just so! But then—as I saved her—and felt the knife in my breast—(*Touching his kimono with a curious still smile of utter peace*)—it was then I saw—(*With impressive finality, raising himself slightly, intent eyes upon the boy*)—that she was *not* my enemy.

HELEN (*Deeply moved*) My country shall hear of this, Masakiyo Saito.

MASAKIYO: It is well. (*He is silent, his mind slipping into the old paths; then, softly*) We shall be as before—our two countries—the old days—Admiral Perry—Ah!—(*His voice a feeble mimicry of the loved voice so long dead*) "Hello," he said—and I said, "*Welcome!*" (*Then, his voice full and thrillingly resonant*) Welcome! Always welcome to America! Our friendship shall endure!

TAKESHI (*Aside to* KENYON) He wanders. Can you do nothing?

KENYON (*Looking him in the eyes*) Dear Takeshi, is it not best?

TAKESHI (*Turning to* MASAKIYO, *urgently*) Grandfather! It is Takeshi whom you love. Grandfather—is there nothing I can do for you?

MASAKIYO (*Coming back slowly*) The Nameless Subject! Adoption—into our family! Had I the power——

TAKESHI: You would have the new name of the Nameless Subject upon our ancestral tablets? Grandfather, is it that? (*As he bows, in weak assent*) Mother—I beg you—the ancestral tablets— (*As* MRS. SAITO *hurries from the room*) It shall be done.

MASAKIYO (*With a sigh*) It is well!

(*There is a silence, broken as* MRS. SAITO *returns, the small wooden tablet in her hand*)

MRS. SAITO: Where shall I place it?

TAKESHI (*Indicating the alcove*) There! (*Then, catching up the writing-box, hurriedly pouring the water upon the bit of charcoal and mixing the ink with his brush*) What shall I write for the new name of the Nameless Subject?

MASAKIYO (*Slowly*) His shall be a great *kaimyo*—for he shall be remembered! Write thus: "Dagger of Illusion"——

TAKESHI (*Writing swiftly, his back is partly turned toward* MASAKIYO) "Dagger of Illusion"——

MASAKIYO: "Of Stainless Sword"——

TAKESHI (*Writing on*) "Of Stainless Sword"— What next, grandfather?

MASAKIYO (*Rallying himself*) "In the Mansion"— (*He pauses, then, holding himself sternly and bravely to his task*) "The Mansion of Deep Loyalty!"

TAKESHI (*Completing the characters, unaware that* MASAKIYO *has quietly closed his eyes*) "The Mansion of Deep Loyalty!" (*Presently, hearing no sound*) What comes after "Loyalty," grandfather? (*Then, as there is no reply*) Is there anything more after "Loyalty," grandfather?

KENYON (*A note of tempered, vicarious victory in his voice*) I think, Takeshi, there is *nothing* more after Loyalty!

(*Swiftly, the young man turns and sees. For a moment no word is spoken.* HELEN *has slipped to her knees beside him, a hand on his in a precious bond. Suddenly, from St. John's, come the soft chimes of "Lead, Kindly Light." For a moment no one speaks*)

TSURUKO: Why, that's "Lead, Kindly Light"! Takeshi, is it leading grandfather?

TAKESHI (*After a long moment, a fresh vigor quietly upon him*) I do not weep. Later, there will be the mourning. But not now. I want to take my first step in the battle—the battle with the darkness! (*Then, gently, to* HELEN) Miss Sargent!

HELEN (*Rising from her knees*) You are going to church?

TAKESHI: Yes—I go to be christened! How beautiful that word is—"christened"—to be made a member of Christ! (*With deep feeling, and a gesture toward the old man*) To-night! I think *he* would understand. And I can wait no longer.

HELEN: Nor I. Oh, Takeshi, the life that old man gave me back—I shall owe it to his people. I must make my people understand. (*Turning swiftly to* KENYON) David, will you let me go to them—for six months—and try to tell them this?

KENYON (*His hand in hers, in swift pressure*) Go home and tell them, my dearest. I shall wait for you. They are generous, and when they know, they will want to undo the wrong.

TAKESHI: In the name of Masakiyo Saito, I thank you. (*He starts for the door; then, pausing and looking back*) Tell me again, Miss Sargent; when he christens me, what is it he says?

HELEN: He signs you with the sign of the cross, "in token that hereafter you be not ashamed to confess the faith of Christ crucified, and manfully to fight under His banner," "and to continue Christ's faithful soldier and servant unto the end."

TAKESHI (*His eyes shining, as* HELEN *goes toward him*) That 's it—that last! Mother! Tsuruko! Do you hear? I am to be a soldier after all. Only—*His!* (*Then, with a beautiful and thrilling stress upon the Holy Name*) "And to continue *Christ's* faithful soldier and servant unto the end"!

(*They stand, regarding his shining face*)

CURTAIN

TWO SIDES OF THE DOOR*

BY

MARGARET CROPPER

* Awarded honorable mention in the Religious Drama Contest held by the Committee on Drama of the Federal Council of Churches in 1925. The separate edition, published by The Century Co. for 15 cents, should always be secured for production purposes.

CHARACTERS

The Little Servant

The Householder, a would-be Christian

A Little Angel of Joy

The Holy Family

A crowd of people, including

- The Householder's Opponent
- A Disappointed Man
- Some women
- Some children
- Some men

The Householder's Guardian Angel

Two disreputable women

TWO SIDES OF THE DOOR

Scene I

Time: *Christmas Eve.*

Scene: *A room in the* Householder's *house, and the road outside the house.*

The stage is divided into two uneven parts by a division running from front to back slanting a bit from stage L *to stage* R. L *is the room in the* Householder's *house;* R *the road outside. There is a door from one to the other near the front of division. The room is furnished tidily and dully. To one side of the back is a raised seat covered with white; by this a little table is laid out for the refreshment of one or two people. The room is rather dark.*

The Householder *is sitting near the front of the stage reading. The* Little Servant *comes in with a very small dish, which he sets on the little table.*

Little Servant: I do wish you would let me sing and light a lot of candles. I know this room is all in beautiful order for the Christ-Child to come, but somehow it does n't feel a bit like Christmas. And, *please,* may I open the door

Householder: Now why do you want to open the door?

Little Servant: I don't quite know.

Householder: Suppose the wind and the dust should spoil all my preparations; besides one never knows who might come in—some beggar off the road. Please keep the door shut.

Little Servant: Then, please, may I stay outside?

Householder: Why do you want to stay outside?

Little Servant: For fear of spoiling something. I want to sing and dance, too, and I 'm afraid you might n't like it.

HOUSEHOLDER: No, you 're quite right. What has come over you to-night?

LITTLE SERVANT: Well, it 's Christmas.

HOUSEHOLDER: I know that. I think you really had better stay outside. You can tell me if anybody comes along the road.

LITTLE SERVANT: Sure to be people on the road.

HOUSEHOLDER: Well, you must come in and tell me if those whom I expect, the Holy Ones, come along the road; otherwise I don't want to be disturbed.

LITTLE SERVANT: Of course I 'll tell you if Jesus and Mary and Joseph come along our road. You 'll have to have the door open then, won't you?

HOUSEHOLDER: Not for long.

LITTLE SERVANT: Oh, yes, in case there should be shepherds or people wanting to come in.

HOUSEHOLDER: When they come I shall know just what to do.

(*The* LITTLE SERVANT *goes out on to the road. To him comes running a* LITTLE ANGEL—*or two if you like—and they dance in a ring. The* LITTLE ANGEL *begins to sing a carol, which is taken up all round. Inside the house the* HOUSEHOLDER *first reads on for a time and then gets the fidgets and goes about the room making small alterations in a precise way. Suddenly*)

LITTLE ANGEL: Alleluia!

LITTLE SERVANT: What does that mean?

LITTLE ANGEL: They are coming.

(*He kneels down on the road, so does the* LITTLE SERVANT. *Enter a little crowd of people. At their head the* HOLY FAMILY. OUR LADY *wears a blue cloak and white veil;* ST. JOSEPH *a rough coat; he carries his staff. They are obviously poor people. You see that* OUR LADY *is carrying her* SON. *A little light shines where His head rests. The little crowd consists of men, women, and children.*

One child clings to the Virgin's gown; ST. JOSEPH *has given his arm to a man who is tired. As they come to the house door, they fall back*)

ONE MAN (*To* ST. JOSEPH) Don't linger here; this house is never open.

HOUSEHOLDER'S OPPONENT: Better not go into that house; he hates some of us.

ONE WOMAN: That man who lives there has no care for others, so how can he care for the Holy Ones?

LITTLE SERVANT (*To St.* JOSEPH) All is ready for you in there. Do please come in. (*He runs to knock on the door and calls*) Master, open the door to the Holy Ones.

ST. JOSEPH: The door is shut.

LITTLE SERVANT: That was to keep all clean. I do want you to come in. (*Knocking again*) Master, Master!

ST. JOSEPH: Do you live here, too?

LITTLE SERVANT: Yes, I 'm a servant here.

ST. JOSEPH (*To* OUR LADY) Perhaps we might go in for His sake. (*Inside, the* HOUSEHOLDER, *hearing the knocking, reluctantly gets up and puts down his book and goes to the door*)

HOUSEHOLDER (*Opening door a little*) Who is there?

LITTLE SERVANT: Oh, Master, open *quickly;* it is the Holy Ones.

HOUSEHOLDER: It is a crowd of poor people.

LITTLE SERVANT: Oh, no, no. (*He pushes the door open, and* OUR LADY *and* ST. JOSEPH *go in, but the* HOUSEHOLDER *shuts the door on the others, incidentally shutting out the* LITTLE SERVANT)

LITTLE SERVANT: Oh, oh!

A LITTLE CHILD OUTSIDE: Oh, but they 've gone away and left us.

A MAN (*Rather sadly*) No room for us, I suppose.

MAN'S OPPONENT: I could have told you that. Why did they go in?

A Woman: They thought he 'd let us in, too; perhaps he will if we wait.

Another Man: I 've done such a lot of waiting outside this sort of house; it 's no use. (*He goes out*)

Little Servant: I 'll knock again. (*Knocks*)

(*During this time inside the house, the* Householder *has led* Our Lady *to the seat prepared, kneels down, and is offering food and drink to her and to* St. Joseph. *Just before the* Little Servant *knocks again, he goes away to fetch some water in a bowl.*

While he is out of the room, St. Joseph, *hearing the knocking, goes to the door*)

Little Servant (*To* St. Joseph) It 's so dark out here; please let us in.

St. Joseph: It must have been a mistake, the door being shut.

Little Servant: You don't mind our coming in, do you?

St. Joseph: Of course not.

Little Servant (*To the others*) Look; St. Joseph has opened the door.

(*The little crowd go in, and the room is now full of people, reverent and happy, the children strewing flowers before* Our Lady *and the* Christ, *others kneeling and offering flowers and gifts.* Our Lady *shows them the* Babe. St. Joseph *has offered some food to the lame man. The* Householder *comes in again, carrying his jug or bowl, and stops, horrified, sets down his jug, turns to the people*)

Householder: Who let these people into the house? Look at the mess they have made. (*Kicking the flowers. To the people*) I know why you have come. You think you can get something out of me; but I don't choose to have all the street in my house, especially when I have holy guests. Why should I be bothered with people off the streets? (*To his* Opponent) How dare you come in? You know my views. (*To another man*) And you! You 've caused trouble enough, you and your like. (*To a woman*) And you with your ugly story!

LITTLE SERVANT: It was so dark outside.

HOUSEHOLDER: That 's not my fault; I 'm not responsible for the state of the road.

(The people begin to go out. The HOUSEHOLDER, *sweeping aside the gifts and flowers, stooping down, does n't notice that* OUR LADY *and* ST. JOSEPH *go out with them, carrying the* CHRIST. *The* LITTLE SERVANT *stretches out his hands to stop them, but they shake their heads and go on. He goes to the door and looks wistfully after them. The* HOUSEHOLDER *stands up, looks around startled to see the Holy Ones not there, goes to the door, and seeing the* LITTLE SERVANT, *touches him on the shoulder and says)*

HOUSEHOLDER: Where are the Holy Ones?

LITTLE SERVANT: Oh, Master!

HOUSEHOLDER: Where did they go?

LITTLE SERVANT: You sent them away.

HOUSEHOLDER: No, no, I sent the others away.

LITTLE SERVANT: They were with the others.

HOUSEHOLDER: I could n't have those people in my house. How could any one expect it? My feast was for the Blessed Ones. Who opened the door to the others? You did, I believe.

LITTLE SERVANT: No, I did n't; it was St. Joseph.

HOUSEHOLDER: He opened the door! Did he want them to come in?

LITTLE SERVANT: He said, "Of course, come in." He knew they had come to see the Baby Jesus.

HOUSEHOLDER: I don't understand why the Holy Ones went out.

LITTLE SERVANT: They were with the others, I told you.

HOUSEHOLDER: I suppose you 'll be going, too?

LITTLE SERVANT: No, I 'm your servant; I stayed.

HOUSEHOLDER (*Grumpily*) You can go.

(The LITTLE SERVANT *runs out and down the road. Left to himself, the* HOUSEHOLDER *begins to tidy rather furiously,*

sweeping the flowers into a heap. In the door left open by the LITTLE SERVANT *stands a great* ANGEL *in a purple robe*)

ANGEL: How quiet it is here now!
(*Silence from the* HOUSEHOLDER)

ANGEL: Not to say empty.

HOUSEHOLDER (*Looking up*) Who are you, and what are you doing?

ANGEL: I am your Guardian Angel. (*He begins to pick up the flowers which the* HOUSEHOLDER *has swept into a heap*)

HOUSEHOLDER: What do you want with those?

ANGEL: They were gifts for the Little Jesus. I shall take them to Our Lady.

HOUSEHOLDER: I did n't know they would be wanted.

ANGEL: Oh, yes, they are wanted.

HOUSEHOLDER: I suppose the people who gave them were wanted, too.

ANGEL: Yes, they were badly wanted.

HOUSEHOLDER (*As if dismissing the subject*) Well, I could n't have them in here.

(*The* ANGEL *says nothing; he is smoothing out the petals of the flowers*)

HOUSEHOLDER: I should have thought St. Joseph would have realized that.

ANGEL: He soon found out.

HOUSEHOLDER: My house is too small.

ANGEL: Oh, no, it is n't.

HOUSEHOLDER: And my feast was too small.

ANGEL: Yes, very likely, but it would have helped. No, your home and your feast were big enough for the present.

HOUSEHOLDER: I suppose you mean that I was too small.

ANGEL: I think that was the trouble.

HOUSEHOLDER: But must I open my door to all the strangers? Did you see? One was a man who has opposed me all this year. The others were people whom I suspect of doing real harm. Must I have my house disturbed and my ways broken into? Must I concern myself with all these others?

ANGEL: Oh, no, there 's no compulsion.

HOUSEHOLDER: Only——

ANGEL: Christ will not come in without them. (*Going over to the* HOUSEHOLDER) O soul, do you think this empty, cheerless lodging, this discreet, joyless service of a small soul will be entertainment for His Radiance and Joy, His Passion and His Glory? (*Stretching out his arms, he remains a moment in silence and then goes out at the door, shutting it. The* HOUSEHOLDER *stands stunned, as if some one had struck him; then he goes to the door, opens it and props it open, stands a moment looking out, comes back, and kneels before the seat where* OUR LADY *and* OUR LORD *rested, burying his head in his hands.*

After a moment the LITTLE SERVANT *comes back to the door with the* JOY ANGEL)

LITTLE SERVANT: Why, the door 's propped open. (*To* ANGEL) I should think you might come in.

(*They cross the threshold rather timidly*)

LITTLE SERVANT (*To the* JOY ANGEL) Something has happened—Something wonderful.

(*They join hands and do their dance again, and the* HOUSEHOLDER *lifts his head and sees them*)

CURTAIN

SCENE 2

TIME: *A year later.*

SCENE: *The same place.*

The LITTLE SERVANT *is lighting candles and singing. He sings a few verses of "The Cherry Tree Carol" as he goes about.*

The same white seat is prepared. The feast is bigger; there are low seats about the room, as if people were expected. The door is wide open.

(*Enter the* HOUSEHOLDER)

HOUSEHOLDER: You were singing?

LITTLE SERVANT: Yes, master.

HOUSEHOLDER: You feel so sure that this year all will be well?

LITTLE SERVANT: Well, I must sing anyhow at Christmas.

HOUSEHOLDER: Yes, of course; go on.

LITTLE SERVANT: What shall we do for Christmas this year?

HOUSEHOLDER: Well, what would you do? I see you have prepared a place for the Christ-Child.

LITTLE SERVANT: I always do.

HOUSEHOLDER: Yes, yes, you 're quite right; it is right to be ready. What else shall we do?

LITTLE SERVANT: Well, I opened the door, and I felt perhaps some one would come and help us to have a feast. You know they do sometimes come nowadays.

HOUSEHOLDER: Yes, I 've sometimes got them to come in.

LITTLE SERVANT: Could n't we go outside and ask them to come?

HOUSEHOLDER: People passing by?

LITTLE SERVANT: Just any one we could find. We might tell them that we were having a feast in honor of the Christ-Child and that He would like them to come. I should like to get a lot of plates; may I?

HOUSEHOLDER: Yes, get as many as we have got.

(*The* LITTLE SERVANT *goes out to get plates. The* HOUSEHOLDER *goes upon the road outside. One of the men comes in who was sent away the year before*)

HOUSEHOLDER: I was wondering if you would come in and rest at my house.

MAN (*Rather gruffly*) I 'd better get home. The wife and child 'll be waiting—not that there 's much to wait for.

HOUSEHOLDER: D' you live far from here?

MAN: No, we 're neighbors of yours.

HOUSEHOLDER: I was thinking of having a feast in my house to-night—quite a humble feast in honor of the Christ-Child.

MAN: I know; you had one last year.

HOUSEHOLDER: Yes, I did, but this year I want it to be quite different.

MAN: You did n't ask us to come in last year.

HOUSEHOLDER: I know.

MAN: When we got in we came out pretty quick—felt we were n't wanted.

HOUSEHOLDER: It 's all true. I can only tell you that this year the door is going to stand open and my little servant is preparing for many guests.

MAN: You mean you want others to come this year?

HOUSEHOLDER: I do. Shall I send my little servant with a message to your wife and child?

MAN: Well, I think they 'd be more likely to come if you came yourself. I must say I 'd like the child to have a feast this Christmas and I can't manage it myself.

HOUSEHOLDER: Well, I can't manage a very big feast. Yes, I' ll come. It 's the least I can do after last year. (*He goes in and says to the* LITTLE SERVANT, *who is putting out plates*) If you see any people on the road ask them to come in.

LITTLE SERVANT: Any one?

HOUSEHOLDER: Yes, any one. I 'm going to fetch a child.

(*The* HOUSEHOLDER *and the* MAN *go off together. The* LITTLE SERVANT *goes out on the road. The* HOUSEHOLDER'S GUARDIAN ANGEL *comes by*)

LITTLE SERVANT: I 'm to ask you to come to a feast.

ANGEL: Who told you to ask me?

LITTLE SERVANT: My master; he said I was to ask any one who came. He did n't say angels, but I expect he meant it.

ANGEL: He 's not here?

LITTLE SERVANT: He went away with a man and said he was going to bring the wife and child to our house.

ANGEL: That 's good hearing; he wants his house full.

LITTLE SERVANT: Yes, but he 's rather afraid it won't be.

ANGEL: He does n't mind things being a bit upset?

LITTLE SERVANT: Oh, no; they often are now. Perhaps you 're very busy and don't want to come.

ANGEL: I specially want to come.

LITTLE SERVANT: Will you go in? I have to watch for people.

(*The* ANGEL *goes in. Indoors he slips down his purple robe and is in white beneath it. He spends his time in the house in joyful thanksgiving. The* HOUSEHOLDER'S OPPONENT *comes along the road. The* LITTLE SERVANT *goes to him*)

LITTLE SERVANT: I 'm to ask you to come to a feast in this house.

OPPONENT: Oh, no, you 're not.

LITTLE SERVANT: But I *am*.

OPPONENT: You 're mistaking me for some one else. Why, your master and I are working hard for different sides. He would n't look at me.

LITTLE SERVANT: Why, what 's the matter with you?

OPPONENT: Well, I don't agree with him. I dare say I 've injured him in our fights as he has injured me. I 've certainly worked to bring his plans to nothing. Don't you remember he turned me out last year? Where is he now?

LITTLE SERVANT: He went to fetch a poor woman and her child to his house for a Christmas feast.

OPPONENT: Did he go himself?

LITTLE SERVANT: Yes.

OPPONENT: I did n't think he 'd have gone himself. Did he know the people?

LITTLE SERVANT: I don't think so. Please wait a bit; it is n't only just our feast. It 's the Christ-Child's feast. He 's really inviting the people. Look! The door is wide open, and you look tired.

OPPONENT: I am tired, tired of a long struggle. I 'll sit outside. (*He sits on a stone near the threshold*) I 'll wait to please you.

(*A very dirty, woebegone little child comes along*)

LITTLE SERVANT (*To the little child*) Must you go home, or could you come to a feast?

(*Child begins to cry*)

OPPONENT: I believe that 's one of our orphans. Not much feast going at home, I expect. (*He lifts the child on his knee*) Come; cheer up; you 'll be all right. (*Child's sobs gradually subside*)

LITTLE SERVANT: I 'll get it something nice. (*The* LITTLE SERVANT *goes in, sees the* ANGEL *in his white clothes*) Why, you are a white one, a proper Christmas angel.

ANGEL: I may be to-night again. I 'm so glad.

LITTLE SERVANT: I came to get something good for a child. (*Taking out a cake*)

(*Enter the* HOUSEHOLDER *carrying a child, with the* MAN *and his wife. The* OPPONENT *gets up; the two face each other, each with a child in his arms*)

OPPONENT: Your little servant told me to go into the house, but I would n't go till you asked me. Do you want me to go in?

HOUSEHOLDER (*Looking at him and at the child in his arms*) We don't often meet each other like this.

OPPONENT: No, I feel as if I 'd never seen you before.

HOUSEHOLDER: I feel like that, too. Strange things happen at Christmas. Will you go in with the child?

(*The* OPPONENT *still hesitates*)

LITTLE SERVANT: I told him it was n't really our feast, but the Christ-Child's feast in our house.

HOUSEHOLDER: Will you go into His feast if not to mine?

OPPONENT: I think I must take this little thing in.

(*The group go in together. The* ANGEL *comes to meet the* HOUSEHOLDER *and gives him a bunch of the flowers rescued last year*)

ANGEL: I brought these for your house. I told you last year they would be wanted.

HOUSEHOLDER (*Laying them before the white seat*) That is a good gift.

(*The* ANGEL *goes and stands behind the white seat. The* HOUSEHOLDER *arranges his guests and talks to them. Outside two disreputable women have come along the road*)

FIRST WOMAN: Strange thing how often you see that door open now. Maybe the house has changed hands.

SECOND WOMAN: I have n't heard so.

FIRST WOMAN: I wish it was a place one could rest. I think I 'm beaten with this life. I 'm just tired of it.

SECOND WOMAN: Oh, come on; you have n't tried it yet. Let 's ask the little fellow who lives here now. (*To* LITTLE SERVANT) Has this house changed hands lately?

LITTLE SERVANT: No, it 's changed, but it has n't changed hands.

SECOND WOMAN: Clever, are n't you? I thought it did n't use to be like this. What 's going on in there to-night?

LITTLE SERVANT: A Christmas feast in honor of the Christ-Child.

SECOND WOMAN: Oh, that 's it, is it?

LITTLE SERVANT: I 'm told to ask you to come.

SECOND WOMAN: That 's nothing to me if you are.

LITTLE SERVANT: You 've forgotten that it 's Christmas night.

FIRST WOMAN (*To* SECOND WOMAN) What about going in?

SECOND WOMAN: Going in there? Why, what good would that do us?

FIRST WOMAN: It 's better than out here. (*To* LITTLE SERVANT) D' you mean I can go in?

LITTLE SERVANT: I wish you would.

FIRST WOMAN: I will then. (*To* SECOND WOMAN) I don't care what you think.

SECOND WOMAN: Well, you can go if you like. I sha'n't.

(FIRST WOMAN *goes in, greeted by the* HOUSEHOLDER. SECOND WOMAN *shrinks to the back of the stage.*
Enter the LITTLE ANGEL, *running. He has a garland of flowers in his hands. He goes to the* LITTLE SERVANT)

LITTLE ANGEL: Alleluia! They are coming!

(*The* LITTLE SERVANT *goes into the house and pulls out the* HOUSEHOLDER. *There is singing in the road. Again the Holy Family come in as before and the little crowd with them. The* HOUSEHOLDER *kneels down in the road in front of his house*)

OUR LADY (*To* ST. JOSEPH) Look, this door is open to-night.

ST. JOSEPH: And there are all sorts of people inside. I see children. We must take Him in there. (*To* LITTLE SERVANT) Whose house is this?

LITTLE SERVANT (*Pointing to the* HOUSEHOLDER) My master's house.

ST. JOSEPH: We have been here before, but to-night it looks different.

LITTLE SERVANT: Oh, it 's quite different to-night. The door has been open all day.

ST. JOSEPH (*To the* HOUSEHOLDER) Do you want us all to go in?

HOUSEHOLDER: I am not worthy—but for the sake of the others——

(*The Holy Ones go in, the* LITTLE SERVANT *taking them to the seat prepared. Every one in the house standing*

or kneeling in attitudes of adoration for a moment. Singing. The HOUSEHOLDER *remains outside, bringing in the crowd. At last all have gone in but himself and the* SECOND WOMAN. *He kneels down at last just outside the door, the* WOMAN *comes slowly up behind and stands half turned away. At the end of the singing the curtain falls*)

(*The curtain rises again on the scene. The road outside is full of angels, singing. Inside the house the* LITTLE ANGEL OF JOY *is giving flowers from his garland to all the people, who hold them out toward the* CHRIST-CHILD. *The* LITTLE SERVANT *is helping him. The* HOUSEHOLDER *is kneeling by* OUR LADY'S *knee, and she has opened her cloak to show him the* CHILD *asleep.*

The curtain remains up till the ANGELS *in the road have finished their song. It should be a Gloria of some sort*)

ST. CLAUDIA *

BY

MARSHALL N. GOOLD

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CHARACTERS

Pontius Pilate, Roman governor of Judea.
Sergius, Pilate's chief counselor.
Marcus, a Roman centurion.
Bartimæus, who was born blind.
Simon, who had been a leper.
Eliezer, who had been healed of a withered hand.
Shimeah, who had been cured of a palsy.
Lazarus, who had been raised from the dead.
Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Jesus.
Claudia Procula, Pilate's wife.
Beulah, Petronia } two of Claudia's maidens.
Miriam, a sweet Hebrew singer.
Miriam's child.
Mary of Magdala, from whom seven devils were cast out.
Two more of Claudia's maidens, Israelites.

ST. CLAUDIA

Act One

Scene 1

TIME: *It is early in the morning of the day of the Passover, perhaps shortly after eight o'clock.*

SCENE: *A room in the governor's palace. Heavy hangings at the back. Doors R and L. A window L, overlooking the courtyard of the Hall of the Gentiles. A massive table and chair, rear center.*

PONTIUS PILATE *is seated at the table, turning over some official documents. A man of imposing appearance, probably in the late fifties, with heavily lined face and close-cropped iron-gray hair. He is, on the whole, an upright judge, anxious to give his best; but he has reason to fear his overlord in Rome, Tiberius Cæsar, to whom he is responsible for the tranquillity of Judea. A situation has arisen which may very well cause him some disquiet, but the full significance of it has not yet dawned upon him. Already, before seven this morning, the Jews, headed by Caiaphas the high priest and all the Sanhedrin, had brought before him one Jesus of Nazareth, whom the Sanhedrin had condemned to death. It was necessary that they should come to* PILATE, *because a death sentence required the governor's confirmation and had to be executed by him. However, they had halted in the courtyard, fearing ceremonial pollution if they entered the Hall of the Gentiles on the day of Passover; and* PILATE, *in condescension to what he must have regarded as the contemptible superstition of an inferior race, had gone forth to meet them in the open sunlight. There, instead of simply confirming the Sanhedrin's judgment without further question, to the surprise and indignation of the Jews he had proceeded to hold a judicial inquiry. Furthermore, he*

had made no secret of his belief that Jesus had done nothing worthy of death. This had brought forth a tempest of rage and hate, and a multitude of accusations which had little enough effect on PILATE'S *Roman sense of justice. The comprehensive charge of blasphemy had not moved him any more than the clamor of extortioners whom Jesus had driven from the temple, and the complaints of the Pharisees about his attitude to the Sabbatical laws. Out of a subtler mind had come the triple accusation that Jesus forbade to give tribute, called himself a king, and had upset the land with his teaching from Galilee to Jerusalem. At this point* PILATE, *finding Jesus to be a Galilean, had at once referred the matter to the Galilean tetrarch, Herod, who happened also to be in Jerusalem at the time. All this had happened only about an hour ago, and already a message has come from Herod informing him that Herod gracefully waives jurisdiction and is returning the prisoner. Herod's message is before* PILATE *as he sits there at the table awaiting his counselor,* SERGIUS. *He looks up impatiently toward the door L. He is conscious of a certain instinctive admiration for the prisoner who must shortly come before him again; and he has no intention in the world of delivering him up to be crucified.* SERGIUS *enters, apparently in some consternation.* PILATE *greets him with a mere gesture.*

PILATE:

I sent for thee about this Nazarene
Whom we despatched, an hour since, unto Herod.

SERGIUS:

My lord, 't would seem Herod hath sent him back;

(PILATE, *with a nod, signifies that he is aware of it, and returns to his papers*)

And all the city 's in an uproar.

PILATE (*Without looking up*)

Yes?

(SERGIUS *feels that his master is not sufficiently awake to the gravity of the situation. He himself is deeply troubled*)

SERGIUS:

I have myself descended to the streets
To mingle with the rabble—question, probe,
And try their temper . . .

(PILATE, *glancing up whimsically, interrupts*)

PILATE:

And you found it—warm?

SERGIUS (*Urgently*)

'T is as I feared. Madness is come on them.
Never was such a tumult in the land!
The streets are thronged with jostling, shouting Jews,
Raging against this dreamer and his dreams.
They breathe their imprecations forth like fiends.
They scream on Rome to vindicate their hate—
This is no common criminal, my lord,
No peasant who hath blundered; rather one—
It passeth comprehension—who might wreck
Their temple, wrest the scepter from their God.

(PILATE *begins to reveal some enthusiasm*)

PILATE:

By all our gods, I do admire this man.
Hast seen him, Sergius? He seemed a lofty soul.

SERGIUS:

Nay; but, in the Sanhedrin, they found him
Worthy of the cross—brought him to thee,
Seeking but thy sanction to his death,
Nor doubting thou wouldst grant it.

PILATE (*Dryly*)

So I saw,
And dared to question the integrity
Of this, their judgment—aye, and finding him
A Galilean, sent him unto Herod.
Wherefore—these haughty priests were sore displeased!

(PILATE *has a flitting smile for the recollection, but instantly becomes grave again*)

Sergius, what wouldest thou? . . . The thing is plain.
By Cæsar's law, the man hath done no wrong.

SERGIUS (*Earnestly*)

Yet must we move with caution, lest we bring
An avalanche of hate upon ourselves.
Their frenzy feedeth on their thwarted hopes.
I never saw such hell-bred burning hate.
Danger is here, growing on each delay—
Danger, my lord, we cannot else but heed.
Already they flock again unto thy court,
Dragging him with them.

(PILATE, *studying the paper before him, refuses to be alarmed*)

PILATE:

So I had supposed.
Wherefore, I sent for thee. Here 's word from Herod.
Herod, it seemeth, is reconciled to us
And graciously declineth to interfere
In matters which have risen within our court.

(SERGIUS *receives this with cynical impatience*)

SERGIUS:

One scarce expected Herod to reveal
To us such gentle condescension—but
It easeth not our shoulders of the load.

PILATE (*Calmly*)

'T is true. Here is the message, nicely framed.

(*He proceeds to read snatches from the document*)

*He sendeth greeting . . . Was exceeding glad,
For he had long desired to see the man . . .
Had heard great things concerning him, and hoped
To see some miracle . . . M-m-m . . . Questioned him
With scant result, but found no fault in him,
Touching these things whereof he is accused . . .
(In which his judgment doth accord with ours)

* Luke 23.8.

Professeth friendship, and—hath sent him back.
A civil message.

SERGIUS (*Nodding grimly*)
Aye; he groweth bland—
But leaveth us still to face these frenzied Jews.

PILATE:
Haply they 'll find in us the cooling touch
To assuage their fever.

SERGIUS (*Anxiously*)
But, my lord, take thought—
All Israel 's gathered to Jerusalem
To hold the yearly feast. There 's touchwood here
A single spark may kindle to a flame
Beyond our power to quench.

PILATE (*With gentle irony*)
Therefore must Pilate
Bend before these slaves, give them their will,
Tremble upon his throne for fear of them! . . .
Nay, Sergius; it is not our Roman way.

SERGIUS:
Yet Cæsar did uphold the Sanhedrin.

PILATE:
Save in a matter touching life and death.
Here 's life—or death. They needs must come to us—
Are very loath to come, but needs must come—
And, coming, they *demand*—'t was thus they spake . . .
(*Rises to his feet in a sudden gust of fury*)
Demand our sanction to their bloody lust
To crucify a guileless Nazarene!
They come, these pompous, priestly notables,
To make of *me* an—executioner!
Demand, forsooth! It passeth sufferance.
(*The storm passes as quickly as it has arisen and after a moment's silence, he proceeds with calm*)

Nay, nay. If they can prove him worthy of death,
He dieth. Otherwise . . .

(*With a gesture of emancipation, the governor indicates the alternative. At this point* MARCUS, *the centurion, enters.* PILATE *raises a hand in acknowledgment of his salute*)

What wouldest thou?

MARCUS:

Sir, there 's a woman—

PILATE:

Woman!

MARCUS:

—seeketh thine ear.
Pleading most urgently thou wilt attend.

PILATE:

Do women now seek audience of our court?

SERGIUS:

'T is something new!

MARCUS:

Wilt have me drive her hence?

(PILATE *considers the matter for a moment*)

PILATE:

Nay. Rome hath ever lent a kindly ear,
However humble be the suppliant.
A moment's patience, Sergius. Haply it beareth
On this present matter. (*To* MARCUS) Fetch her in.

(PILATE *resumes his seat as* MARCUS *goes out*)

A *woman!*

(*MARY OF MAGDALA *enters and pauses fearfully just within the door. With a deep obeisance, she humbly repeats something she has apparently gotten by rote*)

MARY:

High and gracious Governor
Of all Judea . . .

* Cf. Luke 18.3.

(*Impetuously she runs forward and pours out her soul*)
Now may God above
Speak through these lips of mine, to move thy heart
For One who never did but good on earth!
(*For a moment she studies* PILATE'S *face*)
Thou seemest kind, where all are turned to hate.
And thou hast power to stay the cruel hands
Uplifted now to take away his life.
(MARY *is in tears*)
I am but dust before thee, who art great;
Yet, of my love, must needs importune thee—
Am but a woman, mighty governor—
Am less than nothing, yet have sought thy court—
Am sore afraid, yet dare to plead with thee . . .

PILATE (*Kindly*)
But courage! Who is this of whom you speak?

MARY (*Wanly*)
'T is Jesus, whom they seek to crucify.

PILATE:
Again the Nazarene! What hath he done
To gain him such a gentle advocate?

MARY:
He is our Master, Teacher, Friend—our All—
Our very hold on life, and hope in heaven.
And he doth only live to soothe and bless
And bring us happiness we never knew.
He raiseth up the helpless, healeth the sick,
Giveth the erring back their innocence.
(MARY *makes urgent appeal for an immediate ruling*)
Is this not righteous, Judge of all Judea?
Is it not good?
(PILATE *for a moment thoughtfully regards the tearful girl before him and answers with grave decision*)

PILATE:
I judge it right—and good.

MARY:

He speaketh to the burdened, and they feel
Straightway the glad sunlight, the living air,
Songs of birds, the throbbing pulse of life.
In all the world is none like unto him.
Greater than dream of God, he *is* our God.

(PILATE *glances round at* SERGIUS, *who makes an expressive gesture with his hands, as though he would say: "There! What did I tell you!"*)

PILATE:

And—Caiaphas is vexed!

(*There is in his words a profound contempt for the high priest. To* MARY) Are ye so many?

MARY:

'T is but a humble band that followeth him.
It is no sin. My lord, we do no wrong—
Are few and weak and poor; but follow him
Who opened unto us the heart of God.

(PILATE *reproaches her with mock austerity*)

PILATE:

And thou dost doubt the justice of our court?

MARY (*Hastily*)

Nay; God forbid. But multitudes will rise
To testify against Him—men of rank
And birth and wisdom—priests and scribes—
And never one to speak a word for him.
Wherefore, I dared to plead. . . .

PILATE:

Take heart of grace.
Thou hast most ably spoken for thy friend.
Thy testimony may have weight.
Now go.
He shall have justice.

MARY (*With welling gratitude*)

O most righteous judge,

May our God give thee of the dew of heaven
And crown thy days with peace!

PILATE (*A little wistfully*)

I would have peace—
From whatsoever god, I *would* have peace.
'T is somewhat hard to find. But go—in peace.

(*Exit* MARY OF MAGDALA. PILATE *gazes after her in silence for a moment, then turns gravely to* SERGIUS)

'T is but a humble band that followeth him
Who opened unto them the heart of God!
Ah, Sergius! Shall *we* ever know the joy
Of such discipleship? May there not be
Some might of innocence beyond our dreams?

SERGIUS (*Anxiously*)

There 's danger lurking in this innocence —
Danger thou, here and now, must needs avert.
The Nazarene hath subtly stirred the throng,
I know not how—but madness sweepeth the land.
And Cæsar urgeth: "Keep the Jews at peace!"
Canst have thy way and—keep the Jews at peace?
Balk their hate and—keep the Jews at peace?
A rude, untranquil people, hard to rule—
A yeasty people, seething with sedition,
Crazed with religious zeal, clamoring to Rome
On any plea. Hast thou so soon forgot:
Three times already they have borne their plaint
To Cæsar?

Once 't was—graven images!

(SERGIUS, *with much gesticulation, imitates a Jew complaining to Cæsar*)

"Pilate hath brought into Jerusalem
The imperial eagles of his legions—
O desecration of the sanctuary!"

(PILATE *smiles*)

PILATE: They were no graven images to me.

SERGIUS:

"O, foul pollution of the Holy Place!
All hail great Cæsar!—Hearken to our cry
And chide this sacrilegist . . ."

PILATE (*Somewhat ruefully*)

And he did
And curtly counseled: "Keep the Jews at peace."

SERGIUS:

What was the hideous hurt that followed?—Ah!
"Pilate hath hung upon these hallowed walls
Some dedicated shields—Zion swooneth,
Stabbed by such infamous impiety."
(I know not why.)—"Cæsar, give ear—
Nay, take away our lives, but purge the stain!"
(PILATE *is growing uneasy.—He nods moodily*)

PILATE:

I do recall the matter. And again
Our Cæsar counseled: "Keep the Jews at peace."
A plague upon this people!

SERGIUS:

Hearken yet:
"Pilate hath drawn upon our treasury
To build an aqueduct!" The plaint was flung
Both high and far—perchance to heaven—and Rome!
"O infamy, to take our sacred gold
And squander it on earthly springs!" Once more
Did Cæsar counsel: "Keep the Jews at peace."
Is it not so?

PILATE:

It is even so . . .
With subtle hint, his patience is outworn.

SERGIUS:

Three times!—And such were trifles light as air.
(*He proceeds to urge his point with all the persuasiveness at his command*)

What next? Here is this gentle Nazarene,
Trying to teach some new philosophy—
Innocent dreamer—prophet, if thou wilt—
Whose every gesture is to heal and bless,
So said the maiden—doubtless, it is true—
Yet somehow draweth their hate upon his head.
You find no fault in him: again, 't is true . . .
But Cæsar—if, once more, they go to Cæsar
And say: Here is a man forbiddeth tribute;
Stirreth up sedition; hath upset
The people with his teaching, through the length
And breadth of all the land, from Galilee
Even to this place—calleth himself a king!
And Pilate set him free!

PILATE (*Haughtily*)

And if he should? . . .

SERGIUS:

'T were most impolitic. Nay, nay, my lord;
The times are rude. The might of innocence
Is might at which Cæsar may look askance.

PILATE:

Yet leave the innocence beyond a doubt . . .
(PILATE *is shaken, but he still contrives to maintain an unyielding front*)
The man hath done no wrong. He moveth me
To pity—aye, to admiration—awe!
Shineth above these sanctimonius priests
And all their noisome servile following,
Remote, majestic, lonely as a star.
There 's something here beyond their power to touch—
Curs, that would bare their fangs against a king!
There is a royalty of soul . . .

SERGIUS:

Nay, but—

PILATE:

No more, Sergius, no more. The Nazarene
Shall have a Roman judgment, come what may.

SERGIUS:

But hearken—

PILATE:

Nay; what I have said is said.

(*Shouting is heard as from the courtyard:* "Pilate! . . . Pontius Pilate!" *The governor looks swiftly in that direction, but turns again and continues evenly*)

When souls are dark and blind, they need the light
Of justice; and 't is ours to hold the light.

(*He regards the matter as closed, little dreaming of the pressure that will be brought to bear; and, as he gathers up his papers, he wistfully recalls the blessing of* MARY OF MAGDALA)

"May our God give to thee the dew of Heaven
And crown thy days with peace."

(*He is ready to go. He gravely shakes his head over the whole disquieting business*)

I *would* have peace!

CURTAIN

SCENE 2

TIME: *Half an hour later.*

SCENE: *The same.*

BEULAH *and* PETRONIA *have entered, and busy themselves with rhombus and distaff while awaiting their mistress. As the curtain rises, a murmur, as of a crowd, comes vaguely from afar.* PETRONIA *goes to the window and gazes out.*

PETRONIA:

What crowds are flocking to the palace court—
Running from every side!—They swarm like bees.

They mount the walls and throng the very roofs.
Is there a spectacle about to pass?

(BEULAH *joins her for a moment at the window and turns away again*)

BEULAH:

They seek some favor of the governor
Which he is loath to grant. Early this morn,
Already they have come and gone.

PETRONIA:

But look!
Didst ever see such crowds?—They seem to rage—
Shouting and waving their arms. Legions appear,
As though they would assault the very gates.
Whence are they all?

BEULAH:

From all the country round,
To keep the Passover, their day of feast.

PETRONIA:

Ah, yes—the feast, of course. I had forgot.
But they seem little in a festive mood.
It moveth them strangely. Do they never sing?
Nor ever dance—weave garlands out of flowers—
Make mirthful carnival? I should not count
Such frenzy festive. Would we were in Rome!
This people liketh me not. 'T is wild and rude.
Perhaps their gods are wroth. . .

BEULAH:

They have but one.
They say he doth not feast, himself, nor smile,
But is a wrathful, jealous, awful God.
And they must worship him in fear.

PETRONIA:

How strange!
Our gods, I think, are not unlike ourselves—
Rejoice and feast and love and laugh, like us.
Beulah, did you ever fear a god?

(BEULAH *laughingly shakes her head*)
Why should they keep a god who causeth fear?
Perhaps they do not know him—

BEULAH:
Foolish one!

PETRONIA:
It may be he is better than they dream.
I like our Roman gods—
(CLAUDIA *enters, accompanied by two other maidens*)

CLAUDIA:
Greeting, my maidens!

PETRONIA:
Greeting, mistress!
(BEULAH *hastens anxiously to* CLAUDIA)

BEULAH:
Mistress, what hath befallen?
Thine eyes are sad.

CLAUDIA (*Smiling upon her*)
'T is but a dolesome mood.
(*The clamor outside is again vaguely heard.* CLAUDIA *looks apprehensively over her shoulder and nervously clasps her hands*)
Another day, and still the tumult groweth—
Still they assail us with their frenzied cries.
Was ever people so importunate!
(BEULAH *goes to the window again and looks down*)

BEULAH:
They claim an audience of the governor—
The priests and Pharisees. A motley crowd
Is gathered with them—throngeth the outer court
But will not enter in the judgment hall. . .
I see the chief priest, Caiaphas. . . .

CLAUDIA (*Pensively*)
'T is strange
How jealously these Hebrews guard themselves
From all pollution of a Gentile hall,

Yet wallow in pollution of their hearts
From malice, envy, hatred. All this throng
Is come, seeking to slay one Nazarene.
Hast heard of Jesus, Beulah?

BEULAH:

Aye, verily;
There 's none, I think, who hath not heard of him—
A saintly one, much given to dreams and prayers!

PETRONIA:

A wonder-worker, mistress. He hath power
To heal and bless. There 's magic in his touch.
Casteth out evil spirits—so they say.

CLAUDIA:

And yet this multitude would have his life.

BEULAH:

Is this the boon they seek? I did not know,
Save that they sought a boon. Yet I have heard
That he enticeth men with a new doctrine.
They say he claimeth to be some promised one
And call him a blasphemer.

CLAUDIA (*Bitterly*)

He is a prophet,
Therefore they would still his voice; a hero,
Therefore they would nail him to a cross.
Thus it hath happened since the world began.
(CLAUDIA *sinks into a chair, her maidens hovering anxiously around her*)
Ah me! I am aweary of the world. . . .
Is there no balm in Gilead for me,
That I must sink from deep to greater deep,
And in my sleep is no forgetfulness?

BEULAH:

The sun is high, mistress, and all the city
Languisheth in the heat thereof.
(*Moves to open window.* CLAUDIA *stays her*)

CLAUDIA:

Nay, nay;
I would not have it open. Keep it closed
Against the uproar of this Jewish feast,
And all the frenzy of their savage race—
Yet what avail? The shadows darken round.
The sky is full of portent. Voices are borne
Upon the wind, I ought to recognize
And cannot. Who will read the augury?
Beulah, I know not what is come to pass.

BEULAH:

Wouldst thou have maidens in, to dance for thee—
Or one to play soft music on the harp?

CLAUDIA:

I fear nor dance nor music would accord
With this, my spirit's heaviness. . . .
But stay!
There was a Hebrew singer, Miriam,
Who touched her harp to olden prophecies
And sweetly sang of Zion's sacred dream
That God will walk the awakened earth again,
As once in the garden at the cool of even.
Let her be summoned. Haply, at her song,
The evil spirit may depart from me.

(*One goes to fetch* MIRIAM. *In the silence the confused cries without are again heard.* BEULAH *looks down into the court*)

BEULAH:

The governor most graciously goeth forth,
And all the mighty throng importuneth him.
And, in their midst, the Galilean—rapt
As though he heard them not—as though he held—
What shall I say?—communion with the gods.

CLAUDIA:

But, verily, he must be stout of heart.
A man against a multitude!

PETRONIA (*Looking*)

He hath
A kingly bearing, mistress, of a truth.

CLAUDIA:

And saith he is the Promised One. Who knoweth?
Im-manuel . . . There *is* a Promised One . . .
My maidens, have ye ever pictured Him
Whom all the Hebrew prophets have foretold,
Esaias, Jeremiah, and the rest—
The One who is to come—the Sent of God?
Have any of you read the sacred rolls?

BEULAH:

I have no skill to read the Hebrew lore.

MAIDENS:

Nor I.
Nor I.

PETRONIA:

The letters are so strange.

CLAUDIA:

Aye; and the doctrine infinitely strange,
And infinitely winsome to the heart.
It singeth from the lips of Miriam . . .
It may be, one day, all the earth shall sing
The songs the Hebrew God hath given men.

PETRONIA (*In surprise*)

But doth he sing, mistress, who is so stern
And terrible, and striketh them to fear
Who worship him? Our gods leave us in peace . . .

CLAUDIA (*Sadly*)

Haply our faith is just a little sere.
Is it not so, my maidens?—I have thought
Our world grown old. It is a jaded world,
Bereft of its illusions and its hope,
Burdened with ancient sorrows, ancient sins.
And yet—reading within these sacred books,

I seemed to feel, as 't were, some hint of dawn,
Some breath of spring, the strangest stir of life,
As though a way-worn world might yet renew
Its youth. But listen:

"The people that waited in darkness have seen a great light.
They that dwell in the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.
Unto us a child is born. Unto us a son is given.
And the government shall be upon his shoulder.
And his name shall be called: Wonderful—Counselor—The Hero-King—The Everlasting Father—The Prince of Peace."

PETRONIA:

'T is strange. What meaneth it?

BEULAH:

There 's little peace for one who would be king
While Cæsar reigneth, lord of all the earth.

CLAUDIA:

I know not. Only—thus 't is writ.
Again:

"He shall have dominion from sea to sea,
And from the River to the ends of the earth.
Kings shall bow down before him.
All nations shall serve him, and shall call him blessèd.
In his days shall the righteous flourish,
And abundance of peace, so long as the moon endureth."

BEULAH:

Still he speaketh of peace—and Cæsar ruleth!
The words are beautiful; but—peace!

CLAUDIA:

Aye, peace!—enduring peace in the hearts of men!
'T is not the peace that cometh by the sword . . .
I used to think of him, a conqueror,
Marching with armèd host across the world,
And Cæsars humbled in the dust before him.
But 't is not thus he cometh . . .

Listen again:

(*Almost chantingly,* CLAUDIA *declaims the great passages that have seized upon her imagination*)

"The spirit of the Lord is upon me.
Because the Lord hath appointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek.
He hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted,
To proclaim liberty to the captives,
And the opening of prison to them that are bound:
To comfort all that mourn,
To give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness."

PETRONIA:

Nay, 't is too hard. I cannot understand.

CLAUDIA:

Nor I—yet am strangely stirred, as with a vision
Of a man, walking this common earth,
Living the beauty poets dreamed about,
Breathing a benediction on his kind,
Swaying an empire with his golden rule—
A god, robing himself in flesh of man
To lead men back to God.

BEULAH:

Mistress, what then?

CLAUDIA:

I thought, haply, even now the hour had come.
I thought dead prophets rose to speak to me,
And old dead songs were singing in my heart,
When—was it but some five short days ago?—
The Galilean rode within the gates,
And crowds acclaimed him, strewed his path with palms,
Shouted their pæans. Five short days ago!
And now—riseth the shadow of a cross . . .

(CLAUDIA *springs up in agony of soul*)

They 'll pierce his hands and feet, and lift him up,
And call it justice. Nay; 't is very murder!
Ah, Galilean!—They will murder thee . . .
A cross!—The shadow falleth on my heart.
(BEULAH *tenderly tries to reassure her mistress*)

BEULAH:
Yet shall the Nazarene be given judgment.

CLAUDIA (*Wildly*)
But the book! The book! The sacred roll!
'T is written down:
"He is rejected and despised of men—
He hath poured out his soul unto death—"
If this be he whom prophets heralded
It seemeth the words are graven on my heart,
And wound it with a direful prophecy—
"He was despised, and we esteemed him not—"
(*The maidens are casting fearful glances through the window. Confused shouting is again heard above which one can distinguish the words:* "Barabbas . . . not this man . . . Barabbas!")
But hearken to that cruel mob without—
"He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,
Yet he opened not his mouth.
He was taken from prison and from judgment.
He was cut off out of the land of the living.
For the transgression of my people was he stricken.
Yet he had done no violence—"
(*Shouts of,* "Away with him! Crucify the Nazarene!")
But hearken!
Hearken how they cry: "Away with him!"
Hearken!—"Crucify the Nazarene!"—
They bring fair arguments before my lord.
How shall one counsel him? He doth not know;
But I—I know. It flameth on mine eyes . . .
Oh, I am sore distraught. The thing is writ;

Yet is the burden on our Roman court,
And all the weight of judgment on our hearts.
If this be he!

(CLAUDIA *falls into the silence of despair, her maidens grouped anxiously about her, knowing not what to say. At this point* MIRIAM *enters, leading her child by the hand and carrying a small harp. She seems wan and dispirited, but* CLAUDIA *is in such distress herself, she hardly looks up and does not notice it*)

MIRIAM (*Softly*)
What wouldest thou, my queen?

CLAUDIA:
Hast any song to light a shadowed hour
And breathe some comfort to the heavy heart?
Sing me again of him who is to come . . .

(MIRIAM *slowly advances and holds out her pathetic little harp*)

MIRIAM:
Nay, mistress. See! My harp! 'T is all unstrung.
Who can bring comfort, who is comfortless?
How shall one sing out of a broken heart?
How shall one sing, when he who gave the song
Is like to die upon the accursed tree?
He would have healed thy hurt . . . 'T was he who said:
"Come unto me, ye that are heavy-laden,
And I will give you rest." But now . . .

CLAUDIA (*Earnestly*)
Miriam,
Art thou a follower of the Nazarene?

MIRIAM (*Apprehensively*)
Mistress, I have not erred. But pity me—
I only used the wondrous words he spake.
'T is said, they mean to slay his followers—
Oh, what will come of it?

CLAUDIA (*Gently*)

Nay; have no fear.
I think, were I. . . . Hast seen him, Miriam?
(MIRIAM, *drying her tears, nods excitedly*)

MIRIAM:

And all the way was throngèd with the maimed,
The sick, the halt, the blind—multitudes
Seeking if but to touch his garment's hem.
And a poor man, dazed with new light, shouting:
"I see!—I, who was blind!—Glory to God!"
(MIRIAM'S *child runs up to* CLAUDIA)

CHILD:

He took me in his arms.
(CLAUDIA *lays a hand caressingly on the child's head*)

CLAUDIA:

So strong—and kind!

MIRIAM:

He seemeth a harp, the living God doth touch.

CLAUDIA:

It is so strange, I cannot think aright . . .
So strange and new!
(*In a bewildered way,* CLAUDIA *grasps at the strangely contradictory prophecies that seem to attach themselves to Jesus of Nazareth. The fact that, from all report, he sums up in himself and reconciles the seemingly irreconcilable, is like to convince her finally of the truth of his claim to be the Messiah*)
The Promised One of God . . .
A Man of Sorrows, and acquaint with grief!—
The Prince of Peace—What if it should be truth?
The Hero-King of all a world of men—
Yet One who stoopeth to heavy-laden hearts:
"Come unto me, and I will give you rest—"
But, Miriam—what if he speaketh truth!

MIRIAM (*Confidently*)

'T is Jesus who fulfilleth prophecy.

CLAUDIA:

If, with a touch, he healeth sick and maimed
And halt, there is no healer like to him.
If he can make the blind to see anew,
Then is he greater than our gods of Rome.

(CLAUDIA *becomes more vehement and more apprehensive as she goes on. The thought that the burden of judgment rests on Pontius Pilate terrifies her*)

And I have dreamed of this man, Miriam,
Dreams that have stabbed me broad awake—
Most strange and awful things . . .

(*The maidens draw closer in breathless silence.* CLAUDIA, *recalling her dream, suddenly makes up her mind that something must be done at once—some warning given*)

What can I do? (*To a maiden*)
Go; summon the centurion to me.

(*She paces restlessly back and forth till* MARCUS *enters; then at once addresses him*)

Didst thou take Jesus unto Herod's court?

MARCUS:

I did, my lady. Herod sent him back,
Finding no fault in him. A worthy soul!
Truly, this Jesus is a righteous man.

CLAUDIA (*Urgently*)

Hasten unto thy lord the governor
And say to him—

MARCUS:

Mistress, I dare not go.
Even now he giveth judgment in the court.

CLAUDIA:

But thou *shalt* go, and that without delay—
Aye, though he sat within upon his throne.
Fear not. I shall secure thee from his wrath.

(MARCUS *bows*)

And say to him: "Thy lady sendeth greeting,

And prayeth thee"—take note the very words—
"Have naught to do against this righteous man;
For I have suffered many things this day
In dream, because of him." Hast thou the words?

MARCUS:

"Thy lady sendeth greeting—prayeth thee:
Have naught to do against this righteous man;
For I have suffered many things this day
In dream, because of him."

CLAUDIA:

'T is well. Make haste.

(MARCUS *salutes and goes*)

MIRIAM:

Now may the blessing of the living God
Descend on thee.

CLAUDIA (*Gravely*)

Now, on the governor
The justice of thy living God descend—
And may thy Christ have pity on us all.
What is to come? I know not. I have dreamed
Strange omens—earthquake—war—rumors of war—
Sun black at noonday—falling star—
The threat of midnight, when the winds are out,
And all a world moaneth and travaileth—
And I have seen One, seated on a throne,
His garments dyed, as though He trod the grape,
And yet—a King—One risen from the dead
Wounds on His hands—wounds upon His feet—

(*Distant cries:* "Crucify him! Away with him!" CLAUDIA *covers her face with her hands and shudders*)

A Man of Sorrows, and acquaint with grief!

(*She lifts her head and for a space is silent, as though seeing a vision. Then with deep awe*)

"And the nations shall come to thy light,
And kings unto the brightness of thy rising."

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(*Remains a space, gazing rapt into the future*)

Leave me, my maidens—I would be alone.

(*The maidens slowly depart L, casting wondering glances back upon* CLAUDIA)

CURTAIN

SCENE 3

TIME: *An hour later.*

SCENE: *The same.*

PILATE *and* SERGIUS *enter together, as the curtain rises.* PILATE *pauses a moment to look down through the window and turns away ashamedly. Gravely shaking his head, he breaks the silence.*

PILATE:

So it is done. I 've given them their will—
And am afraid—Sergius, I am afraid!
(*Looks fearfully about him*)
What 's this from which I flinch? The very air
Seemeth to stifle me. I cannot breathe.
I tremble, who have never flinched before—
Not even when, within the temple courts,
* I mingled with their sacrifices there
The blood of these insurgent Galileans.
'T was necessary, and 't was so ordained.
But—this is otherwise.

SERGIUS:

Not so, my lord.
In this, truly, thou hast been well advised
To give a sop to these same savage Jews.
Else—who knoweth how they might have slaked their thirst,
Rousing our overlord from Rome?
(CLAUDIA *enters unobserved*)

* Luke 13.1.

PILATE (*Wearily*)

I know.

Dost think, Sergius, I have not thought it out,
And quailed before the thought, and—lost my soul?
My head approved thy counsel, though my heart
Despised it; and my head hath ruled my heart.
(*Perplexedly,* PILATE *runs his hand through his hair*)
Ah me! My heart is like to prove a vassal,
Turbulent as these Jews. Art satisfied?

SERGIUS:

I know 't was for the best.

CLAUDIA:

What aileth my lord?

(PILATE *starts guiltily at the sound of her voice and with a gesture dismisses* SERGIUS. CLAUDIA *goes swiftly up to him*)

Thy brow is moist. Thine eyes are filled with dread.
What threateneth? Do the priests so trouble thee?

PILATE (*Moodily*)

They are appeased. It is the Nazarene . . .

CLAUDIA:

But thou didst find no fault in him.
(*In sudden fearful surmise*) My lord,
What didst thou mean: "My head hath ruled my heart"?
And this which Sergius spake: " 'T was for the best"?
Thou hast not given them the Nazarene?——
And Marcus brought thy word—thy soothfast word:
"Bid her fear not. I find no fault in him."
Nay; look at me. Surely thou 'rt not forsworn!
I cannot think it of thee. Say 't is false.
(PILATE *hastily tries to justify himself*)

PILATE:

The Sanhedrin did find him worthy of death.

CLAUDIA:

Yet art thou greater than the Sanhedrin.

PILATE:

He breathed sedition, called himself a king;
He stirred up strife from Galilee to here.

CLAUDIA:

Nay, nay; all this was charged before
And set before the Galilean court;
And Herod, too, declared him innocent.
What hast thou done, who art an upright judge?
What madness seized on thee—transfigured thee—
Now maketh me shrink from thee, as something base?

PILATE:

Nay, Claudia. It was not politic—

CLAUDIA:

Not politic! 'T was right, and just, and kingly—
The one right thing in all the world to do:
To set him free and shame this rabble horde
That wanton in thy courts.

(PILATE *becomes pathetic in his protestations*)

PILATE:

Claudia, I tried . . .
By all the gods, I fain had set him free,
But . . .

CLAUDIA:

Dared not!—Thou—What word is this
From Pontius Pilate?

PILATE (*Sadly*)

Dared not. It is true.
Long is the reach of Cæsar, dark his heart;
And darkly he threateneth us across the sea.
If once again these spleeny Jews revolt,
Carry their quarrel to Tiberius,
Disturb his ease with plaint and murmuring,
'T will mean recall to Rome; and then—exile?
Death? Who knoweth? Thinkest thou, Claudia,
That old fox Caiaphas is unaware?

CLAUDIA:

And . . . Pilate . . . was . . . afraid!
(*She turns away*)

PILATE:

Claudia,
I tried to save him; but a nation rose
And clamored for his life. What power have I?
Declare him guiltless! They were blind with wrath.
They never would have given him up; but raised,
Perchance, another cross on Calvary.

CLAUDIA:

And . . . Pilate . . . was . . . afraid! O woeful words!
(PILATE *insistently pleads with her*)

PILATE:

"I 'll scourge him, and so set him free," I said,
Seeking to quiet them. They raged in answer:
"Let this man go, thou art not *Cæsar's* friend."
I bade them think what their Passover meaneth—
It is the custom to release one then.
"Barabbas!" they made answer. "Not this man;
Barabbas!" (*Bitterly*) And Barabbas is a thief!
I still besought them, "Would ye slay your King?"
"We have no king but *Cæsar*," was the cry.
"We have great *Cæsar's word* our law shall be
Upheld!"—Forever *Cæsar—Cæsar—Cæsar!*
Cæsar doth make or mar me by a word.
(*His voice sinks to a hoarse whisper*)
O damnèd Cæsar, who hast raped my soul!

CLAUDIA:

And . . . Pilate . . . was . . . afraid! (*Woefully*)
I loved you so.
And so my love is reft of its supports.
O unjust judge, dead to the gods and me!
"My love was fair as the moon, clear as the sun,
And terrible as an army with banners."

Now the banners lie low in the dust.

(*Above the confused murmuring from the court, a shout is raised:* "Hail, King of the Jews!" CLAUDIA *at the window, gazes sorrowfully down*)

They make a mock of him—are smiting him—
Beasts of the forest, clawing at their prey!—
Most worthy objects of a Pilate's grace!

PILATE:

Nay, Claudia—

CLAUDIA:

Yet is he girt with peace—
Peace of a summer's night—as though he stood
Alone upon the mountain peak with God.

PILATE:

But hear me—

CLAUDIA:

See! They crown his head with thorns.
Was this, too, in the judgment Pilate gave?
The blood . . . drippeth . . . from his brow . . .

PILATE:

Ho, there, without!
Centurion!

(*Renewed shouting without*)

CLAUDIA:

"All hail, the King!" they cry.

(*Enter* MARCUS *and salutes*)

PILATE:

Drive me this rabble from the palace court.

(*Exit centurion.* CLAUDIA *draws back slowly from the window and reverently bows her head*)

Claudia, what now?

CLAUDIA:

He turned, and looked on me—
Ah, Nazarene divine, think gently on me!
His eyes met mine but once—and claimed my faith.

'T was waiting all the years for Him to come.
Methinks, in that one look He gave a home
To all the homeless longings of my heart,
For all in life that 's holy, pure, and true—
One look revealed the loveliness of Love
That taketh a way-worn world unto His breast.
It is the light that lighteth all the earth,
And, kindling in His heart, shone forth on me.
For Him will men—if ever they awake—
Face martyrdom—aye, and sing His praises
From a cross!

PILATE (*Impatiently*)

But this is very folly.

CLAUDIA:

If this be folly, then let all be fools.
Nay, here is kingship—kingship over kings!
O Pontius, I have read the sacred rolls,
And heard strange tales about the Nazarene,
And thought and dreamed and wondered—and I *know!*
My lord, 't is not too late to set him free.
'T is all a tragic blunder. Take thy word
Again. It seemeth, in thus betraying him,
Thou hast betrayed thyself—thy greater self
The world hath never seen, but I have seen.

PILATE:

It is too late. I 've washed my hands of him.

CLAUDIA:

Could sacred Tiber purge them of their guilt?
(*She kneels beside him, clutching his arm*)
Here on my knees, my lord, I plead with thee.
A little word; and stay these ravening beasts.
He is a king.

PILATE (*Disturbed, raising* CLAUDIA *to her feet*)

We have no king but Cæsar.

Claudia, 't is no time for dreams—no time
For softness—

CLAUDIA (*Urgently*)

What if thy fate be in his hands?

PILATE:

Fate rooteth in Rome—a grim and fearsome thing.
To Rome we still must offer sacrifice,
Aye, though it be of all our heart's desires.
For Rome we still must threaten, crush, betray,
Cajole, and—wash our hands in sheer despair.
(CLAUDIA *again shrinks away from* PILATE)

CLAUDIA:

Yet leave them foul!—Ah me! Is twilight come
So soon upon mine eyes? Veil upon veil,
The darkness falleth between us.

PILATE:

Claudia, wait.
Thou knowest not the hate this man hath roused.
To balk the Jews of him would breach a dam,
Releasing pent-up passion, blind and dark,
To whelm and wreck and, in the end, recoil
Upon their frenzied selves—aye, haply, bring
Another Maccabean tragedy.
And all for one misguided Nazarene!
(*He sinks dejectedly into a chair*)

CLAUDIA:

Say, rather, One whom all the world awaiteth,
Whom poets hymned, and prophets heralded.

PILATE:

It is a dream. We cannot live on dreams.
Our world is overharsh for fantasy
And song. 'T is passing sad; but they are drowned
Who ever try to swim against the stream.
Be reasonable. Priests rejected him—
The selfsame priests who await the Sent of God!
The people mocked him in the market-place;
Call him blasphemer—will have none of him—

(*To* CLAUDIA, *obsessed by prophecy, this is the crowning vindication of his claims*)

CLAUDIA:

As, verily, the prophets have foretold:
"Therefore will I appoint him a portion with the great,
And he shall divide the spoil with the strong;
Because he hath poured out his soul unto death . . .
He shall see of the travail of his soul,
And shall be satisfied."
Hearken to me.
Thou, Pontius Pilate, art a puissant lord;
Thy word, the law; legions at thy command.
The multitude will tremble at thy frown.
A mighty man! Thy name a household word!
What if a day shall dawn, when that great name
Will summon to the minds of men—naught
Save one who did betray the Nazarene!
A craven!
Oh, will nothing change thy word?

PILATE:

Nay; 't is irrevocable. Claudia,
I 'd gladly give a world to pleasure thee;
But in this hour I cannot own my soul—
Am but a mummer, mounted on a throne,
To dance for Cæsar, palter, fence, betray
For Cæsar—so I keep the Jews at peace.

CLAUDIA:

A mummer, Pontius! Nay, nay. Stand foursquare
And front thy world and play the Roman.
(*Earnestly she studies his expression*)
Justice, though it shatter all Judea!
Justice, though it make the streets run blood!
Aye, justice, though it should confound a Cæsar!
Be a flame, my lord, to light the lamps
Of all a world. So shalt thou be thyself.

PILATE:

The judgment 's passed. The man must die.

(CLAUDIA *gives up the struggle. She glances out upon the court and turns again, the picture of despair*)

CLAUDIA:

All gone!
They 've taken him away to Calvary—
The greatest one who ever walked the earth.
What shall I do? There must be something yet.
I fain would look upon his face again—
Would take to him one humble Gentile heart —
A petty offering, but all I have.

(PILATE *springs to his feet*)

PILATE:

Claudia, what 's this that thou wouldst do?—Take thought.
Thou canst not mingle with the herd—art queen!

(PILATE'S *perturbation grows as* CLAUDIA *very deliberately takes the golden circlet from her head and lays it down*)

CLAUDIA:

No longer. Pilate hath dethroned himself.
Pontius, I go to kneel before His feet
Whom thou hast murdered—

PILATE (*Wildly*)

'T was for all Judea.

CLAUDIA:

I care not—

(*She moves slowly toward the door*)

PILATE:

Now the gods have struck thee mad!

(CLAUDIA *turns a moment and wistfully holds out her arms toward him*)

CLAUDIA:

I would that thou wert mad as I am. Would
Thou wert afflicted with my malady!
It may be there 's some task for me to do.

(PILATE *moves as if to hold her*)
(*Wildly*) Nay, do not strive to stay me . . .
(*She flings out her arms before her, to ward him off*)
I . . . am called . . .
(PILATE *is left alone—motionless, dazed*)

CURTAIN

ACT TWO

TIME: *The same day. An hour later.*

SCENE: *A side street off that which is now called the Via Dolorosa. As the curtain goes up, confused shouting is heard off-stage, R, as of crowds on the way that leads to Calvary. A few Jews hurry through, L to R, to join the throng. Voices can be distinguished, shouting:* "Galileans! Down with them!—Stone them!" *Enter breathlessly, from the Via Dolorosa,* BARTIMÆUS, *who was born blind,* SIMON *the leper, and* LAZARUS. SIMON *stumbles and hastily picks himself up.* BARTIMÆUS *and* LAZARUS *pause to look fearfully back. They appear to be ashamed of their flight.* SIMON *urges them on.*

SIMON:
We must not stay; I know a hiding-place.

LAZARUS:
There 's no one here.

SIMON:
We may yet escape,
If we but hasten . . . (*Abjectly*) Why do we linger here?
'T is death to linger.

BARTIMÆUS:
No man followeth.

SIMON:
They 'll surely come and stone us.

LAZARUS (*Sadly*)
There 's none
Will leave the road that leadeth to Calvary.

BARTIMÆUS:

'T is true. We 're safe enough.

SIMON:

I am afraid.

LAZARUS:

And I—may God forgive me!

SIMON (*Wildly*)

God forgive!
He seeth not—He speaketh not—is *dead!*
But where is God, when Heaven is blind and dumb,
And Jesus dieth?—I think there is no God.
Now . . . God forgive!

BARTIMÆUS:

Hush! Thou art sore distraught.

LAZARUS:

I think God understandeth.

BARTIMÆUS:

Aye, man is dust.

SIMON:

But where is light for him whose way is hid?
I *will* complain in bitterness of soul.
I will say unto God, "What meanest Thou?" . . .

BARTIMÆUS:

Nay, Simon. Hush!

SIMON (*Urgently*)

Yet God is *girt* with might—
* Ordereth the sun and sealeth up the stars,
Spreadeth the heavens, walketh on the sea,
Kindleth Orion and the Pleiades;
And doeth great things past our finding out—
Yet will not lift a finger for our Lord—
Laugheth at trials of the innocent;
Destroyeth the perfect and the wicked both:
So Job said long ago. Is it not true?

* Job 9.

Lazarus, Bartimæus, is 't not true?
He is not man that we can answer him,
Nor is there arbiter 'twixt man and God.

BARTIMÆUS:

But hush! Simon, thou speakest blasphemy . . .
God is not like that . . . The Master said:
"Verily, he that hath seen me hath seen God."

SIMON:

I care not . . .
Nay, 't is false . . . (*Sinks on his knees*)
O God of Abram,
Isaac, Jacob, send thine angel hosts,
Send forth thy ministers of fire.
Is thy hand shortened that it cannot help?
Behold, thy Son is led to Calvary . . .
Thine only Son . . . is led to Calvary.
We trusted it was he which should redeem
Our people. Have we suffered, agonized,
Waited, hoping against hope, and all in vain?
In vain! . . .
Hear them! Hear these carrion-beasts
That raven in the very streets of Zion!
God of hosts, look down—

BARTIMÆUS (*Wheeling suddenly L*)

Hush—who cometh?

(SIMON, *in renewed panic, rises hastily to his feet and shrinks into the background*)

LAZARUS (*Looking*)

'T is Miriam, the singer.

(*Enter* MIRIAM, *with* CLAUDIA *and* BEULAH, *disguised as Israelites, going toward the Via Dolorosa*)

MIRIAM:

Who are here?. . .
Simon, Bartimæus, Lazarus!
What happeneth? Have ye seen Him?

LAZARUS:

Aye, He cometh,
Toiling upon the way, bearing His cross . . .
And all Judea there, to mock at Him!

CLAUDIA:

And wherefore have His friends forsaken Him?

BARTIMÆUS:

'T is death to venture forth.

LAZARUS:

They found us there,
And sought to take our life.

SIMON (*Suspiciously, to* CLAUDIA)

And who art thou?

MIRIAM:

'T is Claudia, one of the faithful few.

LAZARUS:

Tarry with us here.

SIMON:

They mean to slay us . . .
Life is passing sweet; and we are young . . .

CLAUDIA:

Aye; so is Jesus—young and strong and fair.
(SIMON *again regards her questioningly*)

SIMON:

I know thee not.

LAZARUS:

Needs must we find the rest
And ponder what is best for us to do . . .
(*The outcries are renewed*)
Here 's Eliezer cometh . . . Shimeah . . .
(*Enter* ELIEZER, *who had been healed of a withered hand, and* SHIMEAH, *who had been cured of a palsy. They hasten in from the Via Dolorosa, looking fearfully back*)

ELIEZER (*Breathlessly*)

They took up stones to stone us.

SHIMEAH:

They are near.

ELIEZER:

We scarce have saved our lives.

LAZARUS:

Where are the rest?

CLAUDIA:

His followers might find a thing to do.

SHIMEAH:

The shepherd stricken, all the sheep are scattered.

ELIEZER (*Hopelessly*)

Aye, we are driven as leaves before the wind.

SIMON:

Woe unto the priests and Pharisees!
Woe unto Pontius Pilate!

CLAUDIA (*Shuddering*)

Nay; pity all
That stone their prophets, crucify their saints.

SIMON (*Fiercely*)

Pity!
(*His voice rises to a high-pitched fanatical whine*)
God, how long wilt Thou look on?
* Wherefore should violence triumph over us?
Let them be put to shame that seek our hurt.
Dark and slippery be the way they take.
Destruction come upon them unawares
And make their habitation desolate.
Let their eyes be dark that they see not;
Make their loins continually to shake.
Let them be blotted from the book of life;
Let them become as dung upon the earth.
(CLAUDIA *listens with some impatience*)

CLAUDIA:

Words—words. Hast nothing more than words?

* Cf. Psalms 35 and 69.

ELIEZER:

Doth aught pass by?

LAZARUS:

Not yet.

SHIMEAH:

They must be nigh . . .

BARTIMÆUS:

Where's Simon Peter? Peter had a sword.

ELIEZER:

I know not . . . In the hall of Caiaphas,
'T is said that Peter thrice denied his Lord,
Affirmed with oaths he never knew the man;
And straightway sought the outer dark—and wept;
Since when, there 's none hath seen him.

MIRIAM:

Peter—the Rock! . . .

(*She is struck to silence, as a tragic figure enters. It is* JUDAS ISCARIOT, *staggering backward from the Via Dolorosa. He is all unaware of the presence of his former companions. They shrink from him*)

JUDAS (*Hoarsely*)

Aye, stone me . . . slay me, if ye will, ye swine!
Ye are accursèd . . . God!

(*He writhes in an ecstasy of passion, clutching at his throat, as he spits out his curse*)

Ye are—anathema!
O Jesus, Son of God, I cry to Thee . . .
O Jesus, Son of Man, I cry to Thee . . .
I did not know that this *could* come to pass . . .
Terror beyond terror! . . . Deeps of hell! . . .
My sin . . . my sin . . . Is there no expiation?
I did not know . . . I never dreamed a cross . . .

(*In a frenzy of despair, he beats upon his breast*)

O Death—*give* me thy sting

(*He turns, crouching, and sees the others, hastily wraps his mantle about his head, and slinks away like a dark*

shadow. For an appreciable time they stare after him in breathless silence)

CLAUDIA:

But who was that?

MIRIAM:

Judas Iscariot, who gave Him up.

BARTIMÆUS:

'T were better that he never had been born.

MIRIAM:

Nay. Who are we, to—

LAZARUS:

Jesus, be pitiful!

* I fled from out the garden on that night.
One seized my cloak—I left it in his hands—
What can we do against the multitude?

SHIMEAH:

He never was afraid—

BARTIMÆUS:

Nay. I was there
The day when, with a scourge, He drove them out
Who did defile the temple.

SHIMEAH:

I recall
† How once upon the hills of Galilee
He cowed a multitude that sought His life,
And strode from out the snarling throng unharmed.
Not one that dared to lay a hand on Him!
He was a master—

LAZARUS:

Aye, a master of men,
Both strong and brave—

ELIEZER:

He can command the wind
And still the stormy wave—so Peter said.

* Mark 14.51.
† Luke 4.29.

'T was on the lake—He whispered, "Peace, be still!"
And all was still.

BARTIMÆUS:

Yet cannot save Himself.

SHIMEAH (*Stoutly*)

I know not . . . Peter hath a sword . . . O God,
A trusty few with swords! The mob would flee.
The Romans are not heartened to the task . . .

LAZARUS (*Sadly*)

Nay; but the Master would not suffer it.
* "Who take the sword, will perish by the sword."
Peter was there with Him . . . The sword was drawn . . .
And Jesus straitly bade him put it up . . .
Nor would He summon angels to His help.
What can we do? He will not have us fight . . .
I lingered near Him in Gethsemane.
Great drops of sweat and blood were on His brow.
I heard Him plead, as though the world went black:
"Father, if 't is Thy will, let this cup pass";
And then, "Nevertheless, Thy will be done . . ."
He will not have His followers take the sword . . .
O God, if my poor life would but avail
To save Him now—the life He gave me back!

CLAUDIA:

The life He—gave you back!

LAZARUS:

Hast thou not heard
How I was summoned back from out the tomb?
Dead! Others, too—a child in Nain,
And Jairus' daughter. Yet His word prevailed
O 'er death. I know not. I—how shall I say?—
Was far away, and heard a voice that called.
"Lazarus," it said, "come forth"; and I awoke
Even as though it had been out of sleep;

* Matt. 26.52.

Yet had I lain four days within the grave!
Four days!
"Loose him," He said, "and let him go."
And I went softly—dazed—feeling again
The sweet warmth of the sun, breath of the wind,
Hearing familiar voices—worshiped Him.

CLAUDIA:
But—dead
(*Shrinks a little from him*)

MIRIAM:
'T is very truth.

ELIEZER:
We all have known.
It was not done in secret. Multitudes
Were gathered round Him there, and saw this thing,
And marveled—

CLAUDIA (*Amazed*)
Then 't is He—the Promised One.
'T was written: "I shall ransom them from Death."
Yet—who could have believed so deep a word—
Beyond all hope?

BARTIMÆUS (*Eagerly*)
I do not know. One thing
I know: whereas I once was blind, I see.

SIMON:
And I was stricken with a leprosy
And now am clean—aye, clean as other men.
Jesus put forth His hand, and touched me, saying,
"Be thou clean"—No more. The leprosy was cleansed.
(*They have all turned to* CLAUDIA, *anxious to give their testimony*)

BARTIMÆUS:
Alas! Never shall we look upon
His like again.

SHIMEAH:

And I—was borne to Him,
Helpless of a palsy. And He said:
"Arise and walk." Forthwith, I did arise
And walk.

MIRIAM:

But ever He was pitiful—
Full of compassion—very pitiful.
He gathered the little ones into His arms,
And said:
"Suffer the little children to come unto me,
And forbid them not;
For of such is the kingdom of God."

CLAUDIA (*To* ELIEZER)

And thou?

ELIEZER:

I came to Him, maimed—of a withered hand.
He bade me stretch it forth—I stretched it forth,
And it was healed.

SIMON (*Flinging up his hands in despair*)

What 's left to us?

BARTIMÆUS:

Dead prayers,
Dead hopes, dead dreams . . .

MIRIAM:

Ah, woeful day! He dieth,
Who never did but good on earth.

SHIMEAH:

He said
He *was* the Son of God—the Promised King.

MIRIAM:

Is it not true?

CLAUDIA:

Hath He not shown it true?

SHIMEAH (*Looking fearfully toward the Via Dolorosa*)

'T is not of this world—
Yet—verily,
I think that He is King . . .

(*Confused shouting without:* "Away with him!—Blasphemer!—King of the Jews!—Crucify Him!"—)

SIMON (*Tensely*)

They come!—They come!

ELIEZER:

Behold—What multitudes!—

SHIMEAH:

Roman soldiers!

SIMON:

Woe unto the priests and Pharisees!

LAZARUS:

What are we against this mighty throng?

BARTIMÆUS:

'T is He!

ELIEZER:

They urge Him with their spears.

BEULAH:

See how the sunlight falleth on His head;
It looketh—like unto a crown of gold.

MIRIAM:

His mother fainteth—

CLAUDIA:

She is down—

MIRIAM:

O God!

(*She sinks down and covers her head with her arms.* CLAUDIA, *with face transfigured, seems to be holding out her hands in appeal*)

SHIMEAH:

The crown of thorns is still upon His brow.

SIMON:
They 're stoning Him—

BARTIMÆUS:
His wounds are dripping blood.

SIMON:
The shadows gather—it is growing dark.

ELIEZER:
He sinketh down—

SHIMEAH:
He cannot stumble on.

LAZARUS:
They smite Him—mock at Him—O Lord of Hosts,
Is there not anything that can avail?

SHIMEAH:
They halt.

ELIEZER:
What now?

SHIMEAH:
They ease Him of the cross.

ELIEZER:
See! They are taking one among the crowd—
A mighty man—

SIMON:
Now are we all undone;
They 'll surely come and slay us.

ELIEZER:
Who is it?

SIMON:
They seek us all.

ELIEZER:
It is not one of us.

BARTIMÆUS:
I think 't is Simon of Cyrene. See!
They lay the cross on him—the Master's cross.

ELIEZER:
They drag Him on His way.

LAZARUS:

God pity us!
The sun hath set, nor left an afterglow
To guide our faltering steps . .

(*Enter* MARY MAGDALENE, *from the Via Dolorosa. She is disheveled and almost beside herself*)

MARY:

Where are ye all?—
O craven hearts, to fail Him in His need,
When any look or word of love might aid!—
Are ye so fearful to acclaim Him Lord
Who brought God's secret to us out of heaven—
Ye whom He healed—ye whom He always loved?

SIMON (*Sullenly*)

They stoned us—they would take our lives away.

MARY:

Then might we count it joy to die with Him
And know the fellowship of suffering.
See how He toileth on the awful way,
And never one to call Him Master—Friend—
Of all He hath befriended. Bartimæus,
Once thou didst walk in darkness. Is thy heart
In darkness still that thou goest not forth,
Led to Him by the very light of God?
Simon, the leper, He did make thee clean—
Thou of the withered hand, art helpless still,
That never hand is raised on His behalf?
Where are they all—the dumb, whose tongues were loosed?
Yet none come forth to speak a word for Him . . .
Those, from whose hearts He cast the devils out?
And devils drag Him on to Calvary . . .
Shimeah, thy strength is His—He gave it thee.
And Lazarus, thy life—He gave it thee . . .
Ah me! And have they all so soon forgot,
They who were sick and halt and blind—His friends!

All as the twelve who have forsaken Him
And fled—His friends! . . .

CLAUDIA (*Impulsively*)

Maiden, I 'm not afraid
To call Him king. I saw Him only once,
And fain would again behold Him. Who art thou?

MARY (*Bowing her head*)

Mary, called the Magdalene—Lord Christ!
The least of all—yet have most cause to love.
She loveth most, to whom most is forgiven.
I . . . He took me from a deeper grave
Than Lazarus' . . . and bade me sin no more.
And now—my world is broken at my feet.
(*Humbly to the rest*)
Ye knew me, what I was—outcast—defiled—
And at His word I was a child again,
And all the earth new-born and full of love.
God! Would mine own breast were a living shield
To ward from Him the stroke that whelmeth a world!
(*Turning back to the Via Dolorosa, she cries aloud, for all to hear, her avowal of loyalty*)
Master, I come . . .
(*She hastens out, and one can still hear her voice*)
Master . . . Master . . .
(*She is closely followed by* CLAUDIA, BEULAH, *and* MIRIAM. LAZARUS *is immediately behind. The others follow more slowly. Even* SIMON *the leper, after a moment's hesitation, turns to follow*)

CURTAIN

ACT THREE

TIME: *The second day following: early in the morning of the first day of the week. It is just before dawn, and the light is dim.*

SCENE: *The garden of Joseph of Arimathæa. A low wall in the background, shadowed by trees.*

CLAUDIA *crouches on the earth with bowed head, the personification of mourning.* BEULAH *anxiously hovers over her.*

BEULAH:

We must return . . .

CLAUDIA (*Without moving*)

'T is true. We must return.

BEULAH:

Yet do we linger here . . .
What dost thou seek,
That thou hast risen twice before the dawn,
To mourn among these shadows? 'T is dark
And chill . . . The very wind doth breathe of the grave.
(CLAUDIA *rises wearily to her feet*)

CLAUDIA:

I know not what I seek . . . I cannot rest . . .
My spirit leadeth me here; wherefore I come.
My spirit biddeth me wait; wherefore I wait.

BEULAH:

Thy words are strange. Mistress, I am afraid.
Shall we not go now? It is so dark . . .
The silence aweth me; and the shadows steal
Into my very heart. It is not good
To sorrow thus, when thou hast done no wrong.

CLAUDIA:

Yet wrong was done—a grievous, awful wrong,
Searing the very soul of all a world.
They did not know. They did it in a dream.
'T was hideous error. They were not awake . . .
Yet shall they wake one day, mazed and pitiful,
To look down in the eternal silence there . . .
Too late . . .

BEULAH:

What can we do? Why do we linger?

(CLAUDIA *pulls herself together and speaks with a new urgency*)

CLAUDIA:

Beulah, there 's something cometh on the world
That giveth it pause. It whispereth in the wind:
It singeth in these ancient stars, that sang
Together softly at the dawn of life.
'T is borne upon my soul—I know not how—
As though all time had travailed until now
In pain of some portentous happening
About to come to birth.—Canst thou not feel
Some breathless sense of close discovery?—
Some hint of sudden rending of the veil
That shall make plain to us all mystery,
Fulfil our longings, answer every quest,
Banish our sorrows?

BEULAH:

Hush!—Hast thou no fear?

CLAUDIA:

But wherefore fear?

BEULAH:

I know not. Yet I tremble.
Thou dost speak so strangely—and—this place!
'T is whispered: He shall rise and live again
Who lieth yonder. Mistress!—If He should rise!

CLAUDIA (*Sadly*)

Alas!

BEULAH:

But what is that!

CLAUDIA:

I heard no sound.

BEULAH:

It seemed a sigh arose.

CLAUDIA:

'T is but the wind
Stirreth the leaves. Nay; do not tremble so.
(*She puts a protecting arm around* BEULAH)
Poor child! I would I had not let thee come.

BEULAH:

I 'll never leave thee; but—if He should rise! . . .
It is not good to think on Him too much.

CLAUDIA:

If He should rise! . . .
(CLAUDIA *ponders the amazing thought, trying wistfully to link it with actuality. It seems wellnigh impossible to take the words in their literal meaning, even when applied to Jesus of Nazareth*)
Haply He never died.
Death is the meed of weary strife and toil;
The heart of love thrilleth with immortal life.
Love is strong—
Love is stronger than Death.
There 's Mary of Magdala. She hath whispered
Of the living death that held her long,
Until He came to loose her from her bonds.
He summoned her, she said, from deeper grave
Than that of Lazarus. A voice—a vision—
And He liveth in her heart forever. . . .
Methinks, He is already risen—doth reign
In all who knew His power.
The body dieth—
The stars shine out and gaze upon His grave—
And yet . . . (*Wondering*)
There 's Lazarus . . . If it be true!
And many count it true . . .

BEULAH (*Nervously*)

What shade draweth near?

CLAUDIA:

'T is but a mist. The morning cometh.

BEULAH (*Terrified*)

Hark!

O hark! . . .

CLAUDIA:

Nay, Beulah; there is naught to fear.
'T is only birds that twitter, half awake.

BEULAH:

How cold it is!—I hear a stir—a cry . . .

CLAUDIA:

Soldiers about the tomb—the temple guard.
(*Gradually the light is growing*)

BEULAH:

Let us return again—let us go back.
I am afraid . . . Nay; there *is* one cometh.
What—who is it?

CLAUDIA (*Quietly*)

Who art thou that comest?
(MARCUS *enters in great trepidation*)

MARCUS:

Marcus the centurion—Thou here,
My lady!—But strange things are come to pass.
(*He looks uneasily back*)
Seest thou nothing yonder—as it were
A gleam of light?

CLAUDIA:

Nay; I see nothing there.

MARCUS:

I cannot trust mine eyes.
There was a word—
'T was noised abroad by those that followed Him,
He would arise. Nay; it is past belief—
And yet . . .

BEULAH:

O mistress, let us save ourselves!

CLAUDIA:

Hush, Beulah!

(*To* MARCUS)

What is this thou hast to tell?

MARCUS (*Excitedly*)

'T was thus. The stone was sealed; a watch was set
Lest they should come and take Him in the night—
A mighty stone that scarce two men could move—
And we kept vigil.

O Hecatè, thou
That movest in the gloom, what hast thou done?
They will say we slept—'t is death to sleep—
Dishonor—death . . .

(*The centurion makes a gesture of despair*)

Nay; but we kept our watch
Till stricken blind and helpless by the gods.
There was an earthquake; and one, come from Heaven
Garbed as in lightning, rolled the stone away.

(*Again he looks back with a shudder*)

So did we quake and fall, for fear of him,
And were as dead men there before the tomb—
How long, I cannot tell—

CLAUDIA (*Breathlessly*)

And then?

MARCUS:

I stirred:
And I was all alone, the others fled.
It passeth understanding—

Lo, the stone
Was rolled away!—The tomb—was empty!

CLAUDIA:

Empty!

MARCUS:

There have been portents—past our finding out!
Earthquake—storm—the temple veil was rent—
Darkness upon the land. What is to come?

I saw Him on the cross. I heard Him say:
"Father forgive: they know not what they do."
"Father," he said—speaking unto His God!
* In truth, I think He *is* the Son of God.

CLAUDIA:

And—thou hast seen Him?

MARCUS:

Nay; but there is one—
'T is Mary of Magdala—kneeleth there
Before the tomb, and weepeth for her Lord.
There seemed a voice that spake, and she made answer;
But no man appeared.
(*In a frenzy of despair*)
I am undone!
Before me there is death. I must to Pilate.
'T is death to sleep. They will say we slept.
(*Exit* MARCUS)

BEULAH:

O mistress, let us follow! . . .

CLAUDIA (*Marveling*)

Can it be
That what He hath foretold is come to pass?

BEULAH:

I know not, mistress—I am sore afraid.

CLAUDIA:

O God of Israel, if it should be truth
That He shall take the terror from the grave!

BEULAH:

I faint . . .

CLAUDIA:

Nay; there is naught to fear.

BEULAH (*In a tense whisper*)

But look!

* Mark 15.39.

CLAUDIA:

Courage!—'T is a friend—'t is Mary cometh—
Mary of Magdala . . .
(*Goes forward with eager question*)
Dost thou know?
(MARY *enters in solemn ecstasy*)

MARY:

The Lord is risen—He is risen indeed.

CLAUDIA:

Risen!—He lieth not yonder in the tomb?

MARY:

The Lord is risen. He hath appeared to me—
To *me!* O Master—that it was to me!

CLAUDIA (*Still unable to believe that it can be true*)

And thou hast—*seen* Him?

MARY:

Dimly, through my tears—
Yet have I seen Him; and He spake to me—
Called me by name—
All the world is new!

CLAUDIA:

And whither is He gone?

MARY:

I do not know—
He is not here—He bade me tell the rest
He goeth before us into Galilee.

CLAUDIA:

Marcus hath seen no man.

MARY (*Insistently*)

Yet was He there—
The living Lord. I saw Him—spake with Him . . .

CLAUDIA:

Tell on. 'T is like a song out of the night.

MARY:

Early I came unto the sepulchre
The stone was rolled away—the Master gone!
And sorely I wept—kneeling there, I wept;
And heard a voice—a gentle voice, which said:
"Woman, why weepest thou? Whom seekest thou?"
I answered: "Sir, they have taken away my Lord,
I know not where. If thou hast borne Him hence,
Tell me where thou hast laid Him." And I wept,
Knowing Him not until He spake my name,
And it was He, His very self, our Lord!—
O God, what miracle is wrought! What glory
Shattereth the starless night of our despair!
The very trees thrill with immortal whispers;
Hills and mountains break forth into song. . . .

CLAUDIA:

Mary, thy words are strange and beautiful
As happiness itself.
'T is all so strange!
(*She raises her arms in appeal to heaven, as one longing to be convinced, yet still incredulous*)
O God,
Give wings of faith to breast the eternal skies.

MARY (*Eagerly*)

But come, behold the tomb—the empty tomb—
The place where He was laid . . .

CLAUDIA (*With new conviction*)

Nay; I believe.
Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief.
(*Rapturously*)
I was asleep; and yet my heart did wake
And wait for Thee—and Thou wert nigh at hand!
And Thou dost live! And Thou art still the same,
Gentle and strong, to lift the bruised reed
And kindle to life the flickering sacred fires,
To ease a world of all her ancient ills . . .

MARY:

I must away. He bade me tell the rest.

(MARY *turns to go.* CLAUDIA *straightway makes her wistful appeal*)

CLAUDIA:

Mary, I fain would worship Him with thee—
Am Gentile—yet believe in Him—

BEULAH (*Impulsively*)

And I.

(MARY *pauses, scarce daring to believe it true*)

CLAUDIA:

Dost think that He would have us come with thee?
Thy faith shall be our faith, thy Lord our Lord,
If we may come . . .

(*Nothing but this first strange confession of faith by Gentiles could have delayed* MARY *upon her mission; but already she has turned back. Can it be that* CLAUDIA *realizes what discipleship may entail?*)

MARY:

And thou wouldst share our perils
For His sake—be poor, outcast, despised—
Take up a cross, and follow—die, to live—
Thou, who art queen of all Judea!

CLAUDIA:

Nay; we are but the humblest penitents,
Pleading that He may heal our broken hearts
And whisper to us of the love of God—
Pleading that He may suffer us to serve,
And learn, as thou hast learned, the joy of it.

(*Wistfully*)

If we may come . . .

(MARY *has learned much of her Lord. Her arms are outstretched, her face radiant*)

MARY:

The Master *biddeth* you come.
None hath He ever turned unhealed away.
"Come unto me," He said, "all ye that labor
And are heavy-laden. I will give you rest."
The Master biddeth you welcome to the feast.
The Master took the whole world to His heart—
And, Claudia, *He is not dead*—He *liveth*—
Reigneth evermore.
(*Ecstatically*)
O Death, where is thy sting?
O Grave, where is thy victory?
Rejoice, ye daughters of Jerusalem:
Sing, ye daughters of Zion—
The Lord is risen—
(*She flings the glad tidings broadcast to the whole world*)
Let *all the earth*—REJOICE.

CURTAIN

THE ALABASTER BOX *

BY

ANNA J. HARNWELL

AND

ISABELLE J. MEAKER

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CHARACTERS

In order of their appearance

Martha
Bartimæus
Judas
John Mark
Lazarus
Mary
Simon

THE ALABASTER BOX

Act One

Time: *The afternoon of Good Friday, A. D. 34.*

Scene: *The home of Lazarus in Bethany.*

All directions are given from the point of view of the audience. Extreme simplicity marks the setting. Proper effects may be secured by draperies and lighting. If practical scenery is used, let it represent a small room with an archway in the middle back; the doors open upon a road passing the house, with a field and sparsely scattered trees in the background, and beyond, the gray hills of Palestine. On either side of the middle arch are arched windows, each with a solid wooden shutter that opens into the room. A pot of lilies with green leaves but no blossoms stands on the outer sill of each window. At L back there is a door opening into the sleeping-apartment of the women; opposite at R back is a door opening into the sleeping-apartment of Lazarus; *at L front a door leads to a room where food is prepared. On the R wall near the front is a shelf on which stand some earthenware vessels. To the R of the center of the room toward the front is a table with the long side toward the audience. Long wooden benches are on either side, and at both ends are shorter benches. The table is set with bowls and mugs. Conspicuous among them is an alabaster box with a lid. There are signs and sounds of a distant storm. The light in the house is dim.*

At the rise of the curtain Martha *is seen standing back of a table toward the L with a bowl in her hands. She is dressed in the graceful, flowing garments of the East, in color, blue. She has a thoughtful face full of strength and purpose. Her movements are rapid and express decision of character, but do not*

lack grace and gentleness. Opening the alabaster box, she pours a mixture from the bowl into it. She smiles as she does this and then sets the box carefully on the shelf. Then she goes to the doorway and looks out as if watching for some one. As she watches an old man is seen toiling painfully up the road past the window R. She helps him through the doorway and into the room, where he sinks down on a bench, almost too breathless to speak.

MARTHA: Welcome, Bartimæus. Thou art just in time to break bread with us. I await Mary and Lazarus who have not yet returned from Jerusalem, and it is even possible that the Master may come with them.

BARTIMÆUS: Peace to this house! Alas, there is no peace! (*He rocks back and forth in great distress of mind*) Woe, woe is me! Cursed be these eyes which see the sights I 've seen this day!

MARTHA: O Bartimæus, curse not the Master's gift. What is amiss? What grievous thing hath befallen thee?

BARTIMÆUS: Not me alone. It falls on all. The Master is taken!

MARTHA: The Master taken? When? How? Tell me thy news straightway.

BARTIMÆUS: He was betrayed into the hands of the Pharisees. Last night He was taken and dragged before Annas, then to Caiaphas.

MARTHA: What dare they do to Him? Is He in prison?

BARTIMÆUS: Nay, worse. He is taken before Pilate.

MARTHA: But Rome hath no grievance against Him. Pilate will let Him go.

BARTIMÆUS: I do not know. I fear the populace. They are like wolves howling for their prey. Pilate had Him scourged——

MARTHA: Scourged! The Master!

BARTIMÆUS: Aye, scourged and mocked and spat upon. (*He buries his face in his hands*) It was terrible!

(MARTHA *is stunned for a moment by the news, then turns toward the door R back*)

MARTHA: I must prepare a bed for Him. He will need rest and refreshment.

BARTIMÆUS (*Stopping her with a gesture*) I fear—oh, I fear—He will not come hither.

MARTHA: Not come? What dost thou mean? Speak quickly.

BARTIMÆUS: I dared not stay. I could not longer look on His humiliation. The crowd called ever: "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" I ran away in terror.

MARTHA: The crowd! The crowd He blessed and healed! Which hailed Him as their king the first day of this week!—I must go! I must help Him!

(*She turns toward the doorway just as* JUDAS *staggers up the path from R and pauses in the archway. He is a huge bearded man with his dress in disorder. His eyes are wild as he glares about him.* MARTHA *and* BARTIMÆUS *hasten to help him*)

MARTHA: Poor Judas! (JUDAS *throws himself down on the bench at the table and buries his face in his arms*)

BARTIMÆUS: He must have been pursued. The crowd is wild.

MARTHA (*Bringing him food*) Take refreshment for thy body, dear Judas. Then tell us what has occurred. (*He sobs*) Weep not, I beg thee. Our Master must prevail. (*She lays her hand tenderly on his head*)

BARTIMÆUS: Where are the rest? Have they all fled? Do they seek shelter?

(*As* JUDAS *does not reply but sits still shaken by sobs, they sign to one another to leave him to recover.* JOHN MARK *enters. He is a small boy wearing a short tunic and sandals. His face is tear-stained, but he does not weep as he slips his hand into* MARTHA'S)

MARK: Martha, is it true? Do they crucify the Master?

MARTHA: I don't know. What hast thou heard, child?

MARK (*Putting his hand over his eyes as if to shut out the scene*) I *saw,* Martha, when I came down into the city about the second hour. I went to get my colt—the one the Master rode the first day of the week when we all went before and strewed the palms and cried, "Hosanna!"

MARTHA: Yes, Mark, I remember. Say on.

MARK: Andrew told my father yesterday that the Master said He had no more need of it nor of the ass—that he might fetch them from the shed near the dwelling of Matthew the publican. I begged father to let me fetch them, so I went this morning, and I lingered, for the crowd was very great.

MARTHA: Yes, Mark, yes. What didst thou see?

MARK: I peeked through an opening in the throng and saw Him. He was bearing a heavy cross, and they were leading Him outside the city toward Golgotha.

MARTHA: Oh, Mark, was He frightened?

MARK: No, no, not frightened, but He looked very weary, and He wore a crown of thorns, and—and—at first I was afraid and ran away. But then I remembered what He said about being lifted up and drawing all men unto Him. I believe that when they lift Him on the cross He will do another miracle greater than all. (MARTHA *has covered her face with her hands to hide her tears*) Why dost thou weep, Martha? (*For answer she puts her arm around the boy and draws him to her*) Art thou afraid He will come to harm?

MARTHA: Sore afraid, Mark, dear.

MARK: But, Martha, He is the Master! Ever since that day when He put His hands on my head and blessed me—the time when we dwelt beyond Jordan, and Peter and Judas—yes, it was Judas—tried to keep the children from Him when we pressed close. You remember. I have told you many times.

MARTHA: Yes, I remember; but tell it once again.

MARK: They tried to push us back, but He would not have it so. He took a little one in His arms, and He drew me close to His

side, and He said we were of the Kingdom of Heaven. Since then, when He was near, I have always followed Him. I saw Him work His miracle upon Lazarus. He will do a greater one now, I know.

(*As* MARK *is speaking,* JUDAS *raises his head, showing his face. Suddenly the child sees him and gives a startled cry*)

MARK: Martha! What does he here? 'T is Judas, the traitor!

MARTHA: Hush, lad, 't is the Master's friend.

MARK: Friend! Nay, no friend. All Jerusalem knows 't was he that sold the Master.

(JUDAS *slowly rises as the boy denounces him, reeling uncertainly*)

BARTIMÆUS (*Half to himself*) Judas! (*Recoiling in horror*) Aye, I heard some one betrayed Him. One of the twelve—but I believed it not. (*Rising and facing the man who stands swaying by the table*) So 't was thou! Judas Iscariot!

JUDAS: Yes, 't was I. (*Holding out an empty bag*) They would not take it back. I gave it to them, all the thirty pieces, but they would not. I threw them on the floor, all my precious silver coins, and they laughed and mocked me. I sold Him, Martha; I sold our Master for thirty pieces of shining silver. I thought that they would but try Him and set Him free. I thought He was too wise for them. But they crucify Him! They crucify Him, now! (*He flings his arms above his head in anguish*)

MARTHA: Nay, Judas, thou art distraught. Seek thy home and rest. Be at peace.

JUDAS (*Laughing harshly*) Peace? There is no peace. I tell thee I sold Him, and now they crucify Him. I heard the hammers —the cruel hammers—and then I ran. They should have taken the money and given Him back to me. I gave them all the money.

MARTHA (*Aside to* BARTIMÆUS) He is quite mad!

JUDAS (*Wild with remorse*) I am not mad. I am a thing accursed, a traitor! But I shall not live. I shall go before Him to the place of departed spirits, and He shall curse me; but I shall see Him. O my God! my God!

(*He casts the empty bag upon the floor and staggers out, turning down the road L. All sit awestruck for a moment. Then* MARTHA *starts up and paces in great excitement up and down the room*)

MARTHA: And I put my arms about him. I tried to comfort him. I sat him here—here—in the Master's place. Oh, that my arms had withered, and my tongue had been torn from its roots ere I did such a thing!

BARTIMÆUS: Nay, Martha, 't is not for us to judge. We cannot know all his temptation.

MARTHA: Old man, thou ravest! He was His friend—His friend, and he sold Him! His Master, His Lord, and he betrayed Him! I am a weak woman, but had I known——

BARTIMÆUS: Martha, hast thou forgot the words of the Master, until seventy times seven we shall forgive? Hush! Pity him. Think of his father, poor Simon, our friend.

MARTHA: Oh, I had forgot. Judas hath spread desolation all about. Poor Simon! Poor old man! This blow will kill him. We must help.

BARTIMÆUS: If we could but reach him before he sees his son!

MARTHA: Go quickly, Bartimæus; bring the old man here. Judas will never go to him; and if Simon is with us, the blow may be softened when he learns the news, as learn it all too soon he must.

MARK: Shall I go, Martha? I can run very fast; much more swiftly than Bartimæus.

MARTHA: I know, dear lad, but thou canst not carry old Bartimæus's wise old head on thy young shoulders.

BARTIMÆUS (*Rising and preparing to start*) Aye, I must go. I 'll

bring him; never fear. Lift up thy heart, dear friend. I feel in this we do the Master's work—His will on earth, Martha.

MARTHA (*Taking the hands of the old man*) Bartimæus, thou art a tower of strength for all thy years. The Lord be with thee!

(*He exits, and she sinks down upon the seat L of table lost in thought and forgetful of the child*)

MARK: Martha, that Judas is a wicked man.

MARTHA: He is a very miserable man, John Mark.

MARK: Why did the Master trust him? (MARTHA *sadly shakes her head*)

MARTHA: We don't know, Mark, dear; we cannot know.

MARK (*Brightening*) Perhaps 't was so he could show the miracle. I know there 'll be a miracle, Martha. Let us go, too. Let us see it!

MARTHA (*Suddenly recalled to her duties*) Nay, Mark, I must remain at home. I must have food ready and comfort, if comfort may be found, for Mary and Lazarus when they return.

MARK: But they can find food for themselves.

MARTHA: I know. But if the disciples are scattered, they, too, may come here. This is my place. I must have all ready for His followers; His *followers,* not Him. (*She buries her face in her hands*)

MARK: Don't cry, Martha, dear; thou hast forgot. I *know* there 'll be a miracle.

MARTHA (*Patting his head*) Dear little lad! (*She controls her grief and busies herself about the table.* MARK *runs to the door*)

MARK: Oh, Martha, how dark it is toward Jerusalem! The clouds are heavy and black. See! there is a lightning-flash. And thunder! didst thou not hear that distant peel?

MARTHA (*Pausing in her work*) The whole world is racked with grief!

MARK (*Running to* MARTHA'S *side, half-frightened to see the room grow dark at noonday*) What shall we do, Martha?

MARTHA: We can pray, John Mark.

MARK (*Taking her hand and looking up at her timidly*) And what shall we pray?

MARTHA: We shall pray His prayer, the one He taught us.

(*She puts her arm around the boy and leads him to the L of the middle archway. Together they kneel with their hands clasped and their faces uplifted toward Jerusalem*)

BOTH (*Very softly*) Our Father, who art in Heaven, Hallowed be——

THE CURTAIN SLOWLY FALLS

ACT TWO

TIME: *Easter eve at dusk.*

SCENE: *The same room; the doors or curtains in the arch in the middle back are closed. The table is set for a frugal supper.* LAZARUS *stands at window to R of arch looking out on the darkening scene. He turns as* MARTHA *enters from the women's apartment, door L back.*

LAZARUS: How is she? Will she come? She should have food.

MARTHA: But this moment I spoke to her. She will come shortly.

(LAZARUS *sits down at R end of the bench;* MARTHA *arranges some food on the table*)

LAZARUS: Poor Mary! How does she seem? She was so stony when I brought her home last night. No tears even at the tomb. Poor Mary!

MARTHA: Aye, and poor Jerusalem! poor world!

LAZARUS: Thinkest thou the devils have taken her again into their keeping? She was so strange, so cold; not like our impulsive, loving Mary.

MARTHA: Fear not, my brother; no devil hath her in possession. All night she lay upon my breast and wept, sobbing great sobs as though her heart would burst. Then would she lie quiet,

then suddenly start up and cry, "Oh, Martha, He is dead!" I held her close and said no word, although mine own salt tears oft mingled there with hers.

LAZARUS: Tears bring the heart relief. 'T is well. But she must sleep.

MARTHA: When the dawn broke she fell asleep at last, though still her body shook with painful sobs. All day she has slept so until within the hour when I looked in again and found her lying with dry eyes open wide, so pitiful but calm.

LAZARUS: But, Martha, what of thee? Thou, too, shouldst have thy rest.

MARTHA: Nay, Lazarus, I seem to need no rest. My rest is always work, but being the Sabbath, I could not work to-day. I 've sat and pondered over all His words, the many times He sat at meat with us, when I could serve Him. I wondered if I did wrong to wait at home all yesterday. But always and always I hoped that He would come, that thou wouldst bring Him with thee. I had a couch prepared, all fair and white. I cooked the food He liked to eat. (*Her voice breaks*)

LAZARUS (*Comfortingly*) And thou didst well. I 'm glad 't was Bartimæus, gentle soul, who first brought thee the news. I saw the poor old man amongst the crowd. His face did echo what mine own heart felt.

MARTHA: I think 't was John Mark that helped me most. Poor little lad! He tried to comfort me by saying, again and again, the Master would work a miracle and confound them all.

LAZARUS: I know. I saw him this morning crying as if his heart would break because no miracle had come to pass. So many loving, breaking hearts longing to save the Master! But without a head, what could we do against the power of Rome and the Sanhedrin?

MARTHA: How canst thou say "without a head" when He was there?

LAZARUS: True, sister; He was there; but He made no sign what we should do. Thou hast heard how He rebuked Peter when

he attacked the high priest's servant, saying, "Put up again thy sword into his place, for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword." So what could we then do against such brutal force but stand and weep?

MARTHA: I know, my brother, yet would that I had been there! There might have been something I could do. I envy that Veronica who thou saidst gave Him a napkin to wipe His bleeding brow. Hush!

(MARY *enters from the door L back. She is a beautiful young woman with luxuriant hair, confined loosely at the nape of the neck. She is dressed in a flowing robe of soft gray, and her face and bearing show evidence of her grief. She sits on the bench L of the table and covers her face with her hands.* MARTHA *goes to her at once and puts her arms about her*)

MARTHA: Sister mine, sorrow not as one without hope.

MARY (*Raising her head and looking at her mournfully*) What hope is there? I tell thee He is dead. I saw it all. Oh, Martha, if thou hadst seen the ingratitude of the throng that He had loved and taught! If thou hadst stood and watched while all those cruel men— (*She breaks down and hides her face in her hands*)

LAZARUS: But Mary, sister, what could we have done?

MARY (*Almost fiercely*) What couldst thou have done? Thou, to whom He gave back life? Ah, had I been a man with a man's strength! I should have rushed between Him and His tormentors. I should have died to save Him.

LAZARUS: Even hadst thou died, thou couldst not have saved Him. I, too, would gladly have given my life for His. But I must remain and walk this earth as witness to all men that Lazarus who was once dead came back and lives, for so the Master willed. I was beside Him in the throng. If He had wanted to take back my life, it needed but a sign and it was His. He made no sign.

MARY: But there were others. If all those followers had interfered, thy life need not have paid the forfeit.

LAZARUS: Oh, sister, they were but followers! The shepherd had been taken, and the sheep were scattered.

MARTHA (*Placing food before her*) Eat, sister dear, and Lazarus. Here are broth, and bread, and honey in the honeycomb.

MARY: Oh, Martha, dear, it seems I cannot eat. (*Pushing the bowl away from her and burying her face in her arms, which are outstretched upon the table*) Always I hear again those fearful cries, the brutal rabble shouting, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!"

MARTHA (*Caressing her and looking significantly at* LAZARUS, *who is sitting with his food untouched before him*) Dear sister! our dear Mary; always so tender-hearted!

MARY (*Starting up, unmindful of* MARTHA'S *touch and loving words*) The darkness fell. The wind began to rise. I felt the very earth to tremble. Hardly could we see the cross, when suddenly there came His cry. Oh, Martha! all last night that cry rang in mine ears. Out of the terrible blackness came His voice in agony: "My God! My God! Why hast thou forsaken me!" And then I knew that all was lost. My hope was gone. I knew that He would die.—The rest I scarce remember. I felt dear Lazarus's arm around me, and he led me home. And now I only know that all is ended. My Lord is dead, and I shall never see Him more!

MARTHA: Mary, my sister, be not in despair. Hast thou forgot those other words of His: "Let not your heart be troubled"?

MARY (*Listlessly*) Yes, I remember. But 't was long ago.

MARTHA (*Sitting on the bench close to her, facing the audience*) Once our Lord rebuked me saying, "Martha, Martha, thou art anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is needful, for Mary hath chosen the good part which shall not be taken from her."

MARY (*Sitting up, rubbing her brow with her hand as if a sudden hope had come to her*) "But one thing is needful!"

MARTHA (*Eagerly*) Faith! dear Mary; and understanding of His blessed words. Canst thou forget how we sat bowed in grief, when suddenly some one cried, "The Master cometh!" I ran to meet Him. Never shall I forget how my heart leaped when I beheld His face, so full of peace. Then said I, "Lord, if thou hadst been here, our brother had not died." And He said, "Thy brother shall rise again." I answered, "I know He shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day." 'T was then He said, and still I see His eyes, so glorious and kingly, as He said, "I am the Resurrection and the Life."

MARY (*Musingly*) "I am the Resurrection and the Life!"

MARTHA (*Seeing the impression she has made on* MARY) And now you say to me, who saw His face and heard His voice that said, "I am the Life," that this same Lord is dead—that men did take His life? No, Mary; no, Lazarus; no man could take His Life, for He is Life!

LAZARUS (*Deeply moved*) Martha, in spite of what I saw myself, in spite of what I know, thy words do almost make me hope.

MARY (*Her spiritual vision again clouded by harrowing memories, starting up and pacing up and down with deep emotion*) Ah, Martha; thou wert at home. Thou didst not stand there in and chill bleak wind and watch the dark clouds slowly dropping down until they seemed to wrap the world in gloom. Thou didst not feel the trembling of the rock which had been firm. Thou didst not hear that fearful cry to God wrung from His very soul. Mine ears still echo to it. And then thou didst not see His poor sweet broken body which I helped Joseph and Lazarus and the sorry rest to carry to its rocky sepulchre!

(*As* MARY *speaks* MARTHA *gazes sadly in front of her as if she saw the whole scene as* MARY *describes it*)

MARTHA (*After a pause*) I know, Mary; I know. Thine was the harder part—to see—to hear—to watch Him on the cross.

MARY (*Pausing in her nervous walking to and fro, not heeding* MARTHA, *speaking half to herself*) He promised "the good part which shall not be taken from her"! Ah, my blessed Mas-

ter! (*She goes to the window and looks out in the darkness toward Jerusalem*)

MARTHA (*Wistfully*) I would I had been there with Him. But some one had to stay and keep the house. I seem to be the one that waits at home. And as at other times He always came, and 't was my pleasure to prepare His place, so yesterday I worked and hoped and prayed that I might minister to Him again. (*Her voice breaks, and she bows her head on her clasped hands*)

LAZARUS (*Rousing himself from his attitude of meditation*) Weep not, my sister. Think how He always loved thy ministry.

MARTHA (*Raising her head*) Dear Lazarus, thou dost always comfort me.

LAZARUS: I know He felt as we all do, that food was sweeter when brought by thee, the bed that thou preparest brought deeper sleep and rest more peaceful. Is it not so, Mary, my sister?

(MARY *turns from the window with a smile, apparently restored by her moment of prayerful meditation. She walks swiftly toward the table and puts her arms around* MARTHA)

MARY: Yes, 't is even so. Put thy strong arms about me, sister. Thou art like a rock in a great desert unto me. (*The sisters embrace*)

MARTHA (*Wiping her eyes*) Thou art so kind to say it.

LAZARUS (*Rising*) Now I will pull some herbs for thee that they may be prepared for the morning meal. I must be off betimes to-morrow morn and at my work. (*He sighs*) It seemeth strange to talk of work again, since He is gone that made the burden light, yet we who walk this earth must labor still. (*He goes to the door and looks out*) The air seems milder, and the breeze is soft. The stars do smile as sweetly as they smiled three days agone. Oh, cruel world that hath so soon forgot!

(*He goes out.* MARTHA *rises and prepares to clear away the meal.* MARY *sits with her chin on her hand looking*

dreamily in front of her. Voices are heard without. LAZARUS *opens wide the door and turns speaking to some one*)

LAZARUS: This way, Simon; just a few steps more. Let me help thee.

(SIMON *enters, a feeble old man, tottering wearily. He sinks upon the bench at the end of table R.* BARTIMÆUS *follows after him*)

I heard them coming up the hill as I went out.

BARTIMÆUS: We 've come a weary way. May we have food, good Martha?

MARTHA: Sit down and I will gladly bring thee food.

MARY (*Rising*) What shall I bring?

SIMON: I cannot eat. O my God! I only ask to die.

MARTHA (*To* MARY) Bring milk. (MARY *exits L front*) Where hast thou been? (*To* BARTIMÆUS) I feared that thou hadst met with some mishap.

BARTIMÆUS: I went direct from here to Simon's house, but he was not within.

LAZARUS: I know; I hastened there at dawn, but his servant said that he had not been back since yesterday.

BARTIMÆUS: I found a man at last who had seen him when he heard the news. (SIMON *groans*) 'T was James. He said poor Simon started for the hills.

SIMON: I longed to hide away from sight of men. But as I crossed a field— (*He shudders*) Oh, my son! my son!

(MARY *enters with two cups of milk, which she places before* SIMON *and* BARTIMÆUS. *She stands and listens*)

BARTIMÆUS: Poor Simon found the body of his son there in the field. He 'd hanged himself upon a tree. (*All express amazement and horror*)

SIMON: My sorrow is greater than I can bear. (*He again covers his face*)

BARTIMÆUS: I found him fainting underneath some bushes near the place and tried to drag him forth. But it was day, and he feared to see any man. He feared the Jews, and he dreaded the wrath of the disciples.

MARY: Poor, poor Simon!

BARTIMÆUS: So I crouched there with him, bringing him water from a little spring, waiting for dark so I might lead him here.

MARTHA: Now thou 'rt come, 't is well. We 'll care for both of thee. Lazarus, in thy room are two fresh pallets. Lead Simon and good Bartimæus within, and let them rest. They both are in sore need.

LAZARUS: Come, my good friends; come. (*He takes* BARTIMÆUS *by the arm and leads him to the door R.* MARY *offers to assist* SIMON, *but he waves her from him and walks slowly and painfully after the others. He pauses in the doorway and turns toward the sisters*)

SIMON: Aye, if rest there is for me on earth, it will be here. (*He raises his hand in blessing*) Grace and peace be with thee. (*He exits, and* MARTHA *softly closes the door after him. As she returns she takes the alabaster box from the shelf R*)

MARTHA: One thing I still can do for my dear Lord. Ever since the day when from this box thou didst anoint His feet—six times the sun hath smiled upon the earth since that sweet feast, and yet it seems six years, so much hath come to pass of sorrow since—I have been making ointment to fill the box again. Alas! I did not dream I made it for His burial. (*She suddenly pauses as if a light had dawned on her*) Yet, Mary, dost remember? Those were His words; I had forgot them till this very hour.

MARY: Yes, I remember well. He said, "In that she hath poured this ointment on my body, she did it for my burial." He must have known. (*She muses a moment, not listening to* MARTHA)

MARTHA: I 'll take the box to-morrow morning to His tomb, and for the last time minister to His dear flesh. I will anoint His body where it lies and wash it with my tears——

MARY (*Suddenly noticing what* MARTHA *is saying*) No, Martha, sister! That must be my task. Mary, the mother of James, joins me in that precious work before the sun shows light to-morrow morn. We plan to do those last sad things we had not time to finish yestereve.

MARTHA: Nay, Mary, I must go. I feel within that ointment is my heart, so full of love. 'T is I must pour it on His sacred body.

MARY: I know, I know! The ointment is all thine—bought with thy savings—blended with thy skill. Thou hast the right. (*She lays her hands caressingly upon the alabaster box. Then suddenly she cries out*) But, Martha, I must go, too. I could not wait at home. We 'll go together.

MARTHA (*Almost impatiently*) We cannot go together. One must remain. Here are two sick old men to care for. Here is Lazarus, who must have food prepared for him. Disciples will seek refuge here, I know. The house must have a woman here. We might be long away. But one can go.

MARY: But, Martha, what is the house or work at such a time? The Master said Himself thou wast too careful about such things.

MARTHA: I know. But here lies duty, also. He would wish us to minister unto His disciples in their grievous hour. "A cup of cold water unto the least of these"; those were His words also, my sister. This is our work.

MARY: Thy work, indeed! Thou dost the household tasks much more easily than I——

MARTHA: 'T is true. All the years thou wast in Magdala— (*She hesitates as* MARY *shrinks a little, and then adds quickly with a tender gesture*) But thou art so deft, so quick to learn, little sister. Since thou hast returned to us my household tasks seem no longer burdensome when shared by thee. (MARY *does not reply*) I will leave all prepared. Thou wilt but have to wait on those who come and minister to poor old Bartimæus and Simon.

MARY (*Hopelessly*) Then I must stay behind?

MARTHA (*Taking up the alabaster box*) It will be my joy to serve Him again, but 't is a joy I cannot taste if thou dost not remain to do our work. It is my turn, my sister.

MARY: Yes, I know. It is thy turn. I 'll stay behind.

(*She slowly walks to the bench behind the table and sits down, looking for a moment into space.* MARTHA *does not look at her. She is holding the alabaster box tenderly, fondly. Then* MARY *covers her face with her hands and sobs very quietly.* MARTHA *turns and looks at her. An expression of tender understanding comes in her face. She sets the box upon the table with a lingering touch, and leans over the weeping* MARY)

MARTHA: I had forgot, dear sister. Forgive me! I had forgot thy greater debt to Him. "Tell me," said the Master the day that thou washed His feet with thy tears and dried them with thy hair, "tell me, therefore, which of them will love Him most?"

MARY (*Raising her head and stretching out her arms as if living over the scene*) She to whom He forgave most! Oh, Martha! Remember Magdala! (*And she bows her head on her folded arms as if to hide her humiliation*)

MARTHA: Weep not, little sister. Recall, too, that He added, "Her sins which are many are forgiven; for she loved much." 'T is thou must go, thou to whom He forgave most. I know now I was wrong. I 'll wait at home. This is my place.

(MARY *raises her head and leans it tenderly against* MARTHA)

MARY: Thou 'rt sure thou dost not mind?

MARTHA (*Evading the question as she moves away from* MARY *and takes up the alabaster box*) I prepared the ointment. I made it carefully with spikenard, the most precious. I have filled the box. (*She holds it before her with her eyes fixed on it*) That was my part. (*She turns and places it in* MARY'S *hands*) 'T is thine, dear sister, to carry it to Him—in the tomb.

CURTAIN

Act Three

Time: *Early on Easter morning.*

Scene: *Unchanged except that the shuttered windows are closed. The doors are open, and a star is seen still twinkling in the sky of dawn. During the act the day gradually breaks. At the rise of the curtain* Martha *enters from the door L back. She opens the windows and discloses the lilies in bloom in the flower-pots.* Lazarus *enters from the door R.*

Martha: Oh, Lazarus, see! the lilies are in bloom.

Lazarus: In very truth! and the buds were small on yestereve. (*He goes to the open door and looks out*) And so are all the rest. How sweet the morning breeze blows from the fields! Martha, I must confess to thee I almost feel a traitor to my Master, but since I woke this morning my grief seems fled. I feel a strange sweet peace, unearthly as I felt within the tomb, which I cannot describe. Sister, my counselor, what is this thing which hath befallen me?

Martha (*Coming to him and putting her hands on his shoulder*) Brother, thy words are echoes of my heart. I woke to find that Mary had already gone on her sad errand. I lay a moment in that mist which comes twixt sleep and waking, when suddenly, as the fresh wind of dawn blew soft across my face, I felt no grief. Almost I felt a joy within my breast. I rose and donned my garments, came in here, and flung the shutter wide, thinking my mind was dull and could not feel, that sense would come with movement. But when I saw the lily's waxen lips smile at me through the window and felt its perfumed breath, my heart leaped up as if it would leave my breast. Lazarus, were these three days but as a dream?

Lazarus: Nay, Martha, 't was no dream. Our Lord was crucified indeed and hanged in shame upon a wicked tree; and yet——

Martha: Yet, as the psalmist saith, "Joy cometh with the morning."

Lazarus: Alas! we have no cause for joy. I cannot understand unless it be a sign from our dear Lord that what hath come to

pass was in His plan. If that is so then we should put aside our bitter grief and do our work and pray and hope till that last day when all will be revealed.

MARTHA (*Musing*) Perchance I cannot understand. But now I must make haste and bring thy meal. (*As she talks she sets the table with bowls and plates from the shelf*) We will not wait for Mary. Thou thinkest she is safe abroad?

LAZARUS: Quite safe. The crowd that did so soon forget its cause for gratitude, hath spent its fury, and perchance hath now forgot its hatred. It was the people here in Bethany who hailed Him king a week ago to-day. Oh, fickle ones! And His disciples, where are they? I wonder, will they seek His tomb and weep, now when it is too late?

MARTHA: They must come back. They never can forget His words of truth and comfort. Ah, Lazarus! (*Suddenly a light comes into her face*) I recall it now, that saying in my heart when I awoke, those words of Job! (*She has started to go out at the door L front, and pauses with her hand on the door-frame. Her face glows, and she speaks almost as a prophetess*) "I *know* that my Redeemer liveth!" It ringeth in my heart.

(*She exits, returning at once with bowls of food. Meanwhile* LAZARUS *goes softly and peers into the sleeping-apartment at R back*)

I had almost forgot. Thou must bear a bowl of milk to Simon and one to Bartimæus. How did they sleep?

LAZARUS: Poor Simon moaned and turned upon his bed for hours. I begged old Bartimæus to sleep, but he would still be watching.

MARTHA: Poor old man; faithful unto death he is.

LAZARUS: At last they both did sleep, and when I rose early they slumbered still, but they are waking now.

MARTHA: Wait; I 'll fetch more milk. (*She exits through door L front, and* JOHN MARK *enters carrying a rose in his hand*)

MARK: See, Lazarus, see my rose. It bloomed at dawn. I thought the bush was dead. Is it not sweet?

LAZARUS (*Smelling the full-blown rose*) Aye, Mark, most sweet. But why didst thou not let it stay upon the bush to gladden passers-by?

MARK: I plucked it to gladden my dear Martha who is so sad.

(MARTHA *enters with two bowls of milk, which she hands to* LAZARUS)

MARTHA: Take care thou dost not spill it. Tell them when they are refreshed with this I 'll bring them bread. (LAZARUS *exits door R back, and* MARTHA *sees* MARK) Oh, what a lovely rose!

MARK: 'T is for thee, dear Martha. (*She sits down and draws the boy to her*)

MARTHA: For me, dear Mark—this rose of dawn?

MARK: For thee: I know thou likest best gifts of fruit which thou mayst share with others. But I had no fruit. Only my rose. But it is sweet. I think already it makes this dark room brighter.

MARTHA (*Wiping away her tears*) I thought it was the sun which rises now beyond the hills. (*Smiling*) But it may be thy rose, dear little John Mark.

MARK: Weep not, Martha. I thought perchance thou wouldst forget thy tears if I brought thee my flower.

MARTHA: Thou dost help me to forget them, little lad.

(MARY *is seen running past the window R, and into the doorway. Her scarf has fallen from her head, and she is quite breathless. She bears the box of ointment in one hand and in the other a spray of white lilies. On her face is an expression of almost unspeakable joy. She runs to them both*)

MARY: Oh, Martha! Mark! He is risen!

(*At the words* MARTHA *rises to her feet and stands as one transfixed, while her lips move as though she murmured, "I am the Resurrection and the Life"*)

MARK: The miracle! Oh, the miracle! It has come!

(*At the cry* LAZARUS *comes quickly into the room, and* BARTIMÆUS *and* SIMON *stand in the doorway, R back*)

LAZARUS: What dost thou say? Speak, sister; tell thy tale.

MARY (*Sinking on the bench at L of table and placing the box and the lilies on the table as she does so*) Oh, 't is so wonderful! I went in the dark bearing my box as thou seest here. Mary, the mother of James, met me near the road to Jericho. We hurried fast for fear we might be stayed. But when we reached the tomb, behold! the stone was rolled away and His dear body gone.

ALL: Gone?

MARY (*Not heeding the interruption*) Then Mary wept and waited, but I ran on to seek aid, for I was wild with grief.

MARTHA: Poor child!

MARY: I knew not where I went, but I met John and Simon Peter. Then we all ran and entered in and saw the tomb all gaping empty with the linen clothes folded together, and the napkin which wrapped His head laid by itself. Then did they fall into a deep despair and hurried to their homes.

LAZARUS: And thou? What didst thou?

MARY: I? I could not leave the place where He had lain. Again I entered in the tomb, weeping, dismayed, and Mary with me. Suddenly, through eyes 'most blinded by our tears, we saw a man.

ALL: A man?

LAZARUS: A Roman or a Jew?

MARY: Nay, he was like no other man that I have ever seen, so radiant, so fair he was. We heard a voice which seemed to speak unto our very souls saying, "Fear not, He is not here, for He is risen."

ALL (*Drawing a long breath of wonder*) Ah!

MARY: We dared not look upon His face, so bright it was, but hurried out, and Mary fled. I stood alone, still weeping, loath to

go. Then seeing this fair lily at my feet, I stopped to pluck it, when I heard a voice——

MARTHA: 'T was His! The Master's?

MARY: Aye; there is no other voice in all the world, and yet I knew it not, saying "Woman, why weepest thou? Whom seekest thou?" I thought it was the gardener who spoke, for there he stood beside me. Then I implored that he should tell me where he had taken my Lord's body. Then he spoke in that voice to which my heart leaped up: "Mary." I knew Him then. I fell down at His feet crying, "Rabboni, my dear Lord, 't is Thou!"

BARTIMÆUS: What was He like? Was it a vision?

MARY: Nay, He was flesh. He bade me touch Him not, but I could see! No grief, no sorrow shone from out His eyes; just love and pity. (*She rises, waving her hands as if brushing their questions aside*) I cannot tell it, for I have no words, but I have seen Him—risen from the dead!

MARTHA (*Rousing herself as if from a trance*) Did He say more?

MARY: He bade me tell the news to the disciples. Then I looked, and saw Him not. So, I hastened here to thee.

(*At first* SIMON *has stood timidly near the door, but he has drawn nearer and nearer during* MARY'S *narrative. Standing at the end of the table R, he falls on his knees, lifting his hands in prayer*)

SIMON: "Mine eyes have seen thy salvation—" (*He continues to murmur as if in prayer. The others exchange glances and rejoice that the strain is broken*)

BARTIMÆUS: Blessed be these eyes which were opened for this day! I go to spread the news. I 'll seek the scattered sheep.

LAZARUS: I, too, will go. We must tell all who love Him.

MARK: May *I* come with thee, Lazarus?

LAZARUS: Aye, lad, make haste.

(MARK *runs to* MARY *and embraces her, then to* MARTHA)

MARK: Martha, Martha! It was to be a miracle. I knew it always.

MARTHA (*Drawing him to her tenderly as she murmurs*) "Of such is the kingdom of Heaven."

(SIMON *has risen as the others make ready to go out and stands watching them as* BARTIMÆUS, LAZARUS, *and* MARK *disappear through the door. Then he slowly walks toward the archway*)

Simon, wait yet a little while. Thou hast not strength enough for so long a walk.

SIMON (*Turning toward her*) My strength is returned unto me again.

MARTHA: "Blessed are they that mourn; for they shall be comforted." Think of His words, dear Simon.

SIMON (*Slowly*) "Blessed are they that mourn!" (*Then raising his hand as if to bless*) And blessing on this house! Blessed are the merciful!

MARTHA: Simon, go in peace.

MARY: To thine own house?

SIMON: To mine own house, to serve Him as long as life shall last. Farewell!

MARTHA AND MARY (*Standing in the door and waving as he exits past the window L*) Farewell!

MARY: Martha, wilt thou go seek the Master? I will stay here and keep the house for thee.

MARTHA: Nay, sister, go and spread the blessed tidings, as our Lord did bid thee. I will wait here. This humble dwelling was always home to Him when He would make it so. Now that He walks again upon the earth, I know His steps will bring Him to this place as they did oft before, and He shall find me waiting for Him here.

MARY: Dear Martha! Such joy, such peace! (*She opens her arms toward the archway, which now frames the new day*) Such a resplendent dawn when such a sun hath risen on the world! Farewell, awhile. I 'll hasten to return. (*She goes out, turning to R*)

(MARTHA *stands for a moment with a great light of joy in her eyes. Then she moves dreamily within the room and drops on her knees beside the bench at the L end of the table, half facing the doorway. Her head is raised, and her eyes are closed for a moment; then she opens her eyes as if responding to a call and stretches out her arms toward the door in a gesture of welcome.*

A Light appears coming along the road from the R, increasing in brightness as from a luminous body drawing ever nearer. The expression of MARTHA'S *face as she recognizes its significance becomes ecstatic. The brightness intensifies until the doorway is flooded with radiance*)

THE CURTAIN SLOWLY FALLS

WHITHER GOEST THOU?*

BY

CARLETON H. CURRIE

* Selected by the publisher to be given the Samuel French Award for the best one-act religious play of sufficient merit for publication which should be written in the course on the Writing of Religious Drama given by Esther Willard Bates in the Summer School of Religious Drama, Auburn, New York, July 6-24, 1925, under the auspices of the Committee on Drama of the Federal Council of Churches, in affiliation with Auburn Theological Seminary. Reprinted by permission of Samuel French, 25 W. 45th Street, New York, from whom the separate edition, published for 30 cents, should always be secured for production purposes. Copyright, 1926, by Samuel French.

CHARACTERS

PRISCA, a Jew, born in Italy, dressed as a Roman. A prominent elder in the church at Rome, where he now lives. The church met in his house until the persecution forced them to hold their meetings in old tombs outside the city. Now a man about middle age.

AQUILA, wife of Prisca, also a Jew, but dressed as a Roman woman, about middle age.

JUNIAS, a young Roman, about eighteen years of age, full of vigor, enthusiasm, youthful eagerness. A convert to the Christian faith when quite young, now a favorite of Peter.

PETER, the disciple, now head of the church in Rome. An old man now, with white hair and beard, but still strong and vigorous of soul, somewhat weakened in body. Dressed as a Jew in Oriental costume.

VINICIUS, a Roman guard, holding a subordinate position. A large, powerful man about thirty-five years old, with the characteristic military spirit; protected by leather armor and carrying a spear.

PETRONIUS, another Roman guard, under Vinicius. Medium build; about thirty years old; kindly nature; secretly a member of a party seeking to oust Nero from his throne.

THE VISION, the figure of the Christ; fairly tall, with strong and expressive voice. Clad in a long white robe, with a white hood or veil over the face, a crown of thorns on the head. A small flash-light bulb may be concealed on each side of the head in the folds of the veil. This character should preferably be portrayed by a minister; or if there are objections to a personal portrayal, a suitable light and a voice off-stage can be used without any figure appearing.

WHITHER GOEST THOU?

TIME: *A. D. 64, during the persecution of the Christians by Nero in Rome; an evening when the persecution is at its height. Lighting dim to suggest evening, and growing dimmer during the play if possible.*

SCENE: *Just outside the city of Rome on the Appian Way. Road in the foreground, rocks in the background. At the left is the city. To the right the Appian Way leads away from the city.*

From behind the rock at the left rear PRISCA *looks out, and seeing no one, comes forward. He looks both ways along the road, listens intently, then turns toward the same rock and calls softly.*

PRISCA: Come forth, Aquila.

AQUILA: Is it safe?

PRISCA: Quite safe.

(AQUILA *comes forward and joins* PRISCA. *He grasps her hand, and they talk in low tones while looking carefully up and down the road*)

AQUILA: The others?

PRISCA: They are not here yet.

AQUILA: They are late.

PRISCA: No. We agreed to meet when the sun dipped behind the hills. (*Points away from city*) I hope they come soon. We have far to travel.

AQUILA: And danger besets us all the way.

PRISCA: Yes. I fear Father Peter will not stand the journey.

AQUILA: He is much weakened by lack of food.

PRISCA: Another month in those tombs (*Looks behind*), and we should all be ready to take our places there with the dead.

AQUILA: I am glad to leave those dark caverns.

PRISCA: I, too. But they have served us well as a place of refuge from the wrath of the Romans.

AQUILA: Yes. It is fortunate our hiding-place has not been discovered.

PRISCA: Very true. It is wise to leave now before we are caught like rats in a hole.

AQUILA: So I told Father Peter, but he still hopes Nero may be moved by the faithfulness of our martyred brothers.

PRISCA: The people also are our enemies since Nero told them we Christians set fire to the city.

AQUILA: Yes. We are beset on every hand. It is well we are going.

(JUNIAS *appears from behind the rock at the R rear and hurries forward to join* PRISCA *and* AQUILA)

JUNIAS: Prisca! Aquila!

(*They turn quickly, with momentary apprehension, then relief as they recognize him*)

PRISCA: Junias! You startled me.

AQUILA: I feared some guard had seen us.

JUNIAS: A guard! I saw none. They are amusing themselves at Nero's revels. Cruelty and slaughter are meat and drink to these soldiers of Rome.

AQUILA: So it seems. We should thank our God they are staying within the city to-night.

PRISCA: What of Father Peter? (*Turning to* JUNIAS)

JUNIAS: An hour ago he was bidding farewell to the remnant of his flock at our chapel underground. He was yet but half persuaded to leave this place of fire and death.

PRISCA: Surely he will not fail us.

AQUILA: The sun has slipped behind the hills. It is time for our departure.

PRISCA: Could some stray guard have met him? They know no mercy, these guards of Nero. They call us Christians "dogs," and delight to see us suffer.

JUNIAS: Only yesterday they captured Andronicus, my dearest friend. I shall never see him again. (*Anger rises*) Yes, he may be one of the human torches in Nero's garden to-night. Nero, that brute of brutes, laughs! The people shout! Emperor and people!

AQUILA (*Touching his shoulder restrainingly*) Speak not so loudly, lest some one hear you and we all be lost.

PRISCA: Yes, restrain yourself, Junias. Hatred has no place in a Christian's heart. Remember our Lord's command that we shall love our enemies and even pray for them that persecute us?

JUNIAS (*Humbled. Then slowly*) Yes, Father Peter has taught me those words of the Christ. . . . (*Looking up repentantly*) Forgive me, Father, as I forgive them.

AQUILA: Hark!

PRISCA: Peter!

PETER (*Entering from the left*) Hail, friends!

JUNIAS (*Joyfully*) Father!

AQUILA: Father Peter! You have come.

PRISCA: I was fearful that some one had seen and stopped you.

PETER: I thank our Lord He led me safely. (*Thoughtfully*) Perhaps it is His will. But it breaks my heart to leave my flock.

PRISCA: They also can leave and seek safety.

AQUILA: They wanted you to go, Father, before it was too late.

PETER: Yes. If they had not begged me to fly, I should have stayed.

JUNIAS: They can escape as we are. There are not many left now.

PETER: Alas! Yes! So few. But the others died nobly, martyrs for the Christ.

PRISCA: Yes, Father. You can be justly proud of their courage.

PETER: I had hoped their constancy would touch even Nero's heart, but no!

AQUILA: He has a demon.

PETER (*Turning toward the city*) O Rome! Mistress of the earth! Would that you might see the Light and become the city set on a hill, a light unto the world!

PRISCA (*Anxiously*) Shall we not start at once, Father Peter? We have a long night's journey before us if we reach Antium at dawn.

AQUILA: Besides we know not when some one may pass this way.

PETER: Yes, Prisca. We must go.

JUNIAS: Let me help you, Father.

PETER (*Turning again toward the city*) Farewell, Rome!

(JUNIAS *takes his place beside* PETER *and assists him.* PRISCA *and* AQUILA *are ahead as they move across the stage toward R. Before they have passed R center the two guards enter from R rear and come forward to intercept the Christians*)

VINICIUS: Halt, travelers! Come you from the city?

(*The Christians are surprised and with difficulty control their fear and anxiety. They do not answer the question*)

PETRONIUS: Have you a pass from the captain of the guard?

PETER: We have none.

VINICIUS: Then back to the city. Some drunken warder must have let you through the gate.

PETRONIUS: Nero has decreed that no one shall leave the city without a letter from the captain of his guards, lest some of the Christians escape.

VINICIUS: He is planning another great show at the circus. (*With a cruel laugh*) He must not be deprived of victims for his amusement.

PRISCA: Sir, we are peaceful travelers bound for Antium.

PETRONIUS: You knew a pass was required.

PETER: We know nothing of Nero's decree.

VINICIUS: What? Have you not been at the circus and heard his orders read?

PETRONIUS (*Sarcastically*) I thought all Rome attended the circus.

AQUILA: We care not to see the Christians devoured by the lions or dragged behind the chariots.

VINICIUS: They set fire to Rome. They deserve to die.

PETER: Who saw them start the fire?

VINICIUS: Somebody who carried the word to Nero. You do not think he would publicly accuse the Christians without proof?

PETER: No, yet one of their enemies might have testified falsely against them.

PRISCA: Yes, that is possible. Some Romans say the gods are angry at Nero, hence the fire.

VINICIUS: Some say these Christians worship a god who claims to be the only true god. To please him they set fire to Rome to destroy our temples.

PETER (*Horrified*) No! No! He is a god of love. They would not do such a thing.

(VINICIUS *becomes very suspicious at once and watches the Christians more closely*)

PETRONIUS: I know nothing about the will of the gods, but I was on guard at the palace the first night of the fire and saw Nero watch it from his garden. He seemed to enjoy the spectacle immensely, as though he had wished for it to happen.

VINICIUS: Silence, Petronius! Your tongue speaks too easily.

PETRONIUS: I overheard two of the consuls there say as much to one another.

VINICIUS: It is treason, and you had better not repeat it. (*Turning to the Christians*) You seem to know something about these Christians. Perhaps you can tell us where they are hiding these days.

PRISCA: No. We have nothing to tell, sir. Will you be kind enough to let us resume our journey? We have far to go.

VINICIUS: Is not this rather late in the day to begin such a journey?

PRISCA: Yes, but we—we could not start earlier.

VINICIUS: I think you had better return with us to the city and show me that gate-keeper who let you through without a pass. He must be disciplined for his carelessness.

PRISCA: We did not come through the gate, sir.

VINICIUS: Not through the gate! (*Glances significantly at* PETRONIUS) Maybe you will tell us how you did get here.

PRISCA: We do not care to say, sir.

VINICIUS (*Angrily*) What! You refuse to tell us!

PETRONIUS: Perhaps you will tell us who you are.

(PETER *starts forward to speak, but* PRISCA *pushes him back*)

VINICIUS (*Aroused*) I know who you are. You are Christians trying to escape from Rome.

PETER (*Pushing* PRISCA *aside*) That we are, and proud to bear the name of Christian.

(*The Christians draw themselves up proudly and remain silent.* VINICIUS *is taken back by the boldness of* PETER, *and* PETRONIUS *is impressed*)

PETRONIUS: Know you what those words mean?

PETER: Yes.

VINICIUS: So by your own word you give yourself to death.

PETRONIUS: Old man, be silent! We may forget we heard.

PETER: I will not deny my Lord—again!

VINICIUS (*Impressed, but assuming his authority*) You have made your choice. Back to the city you go as my prisoners.

PETRONIUS: No one knows what you will suffer there at Nero's hands.

JUNIAS (*Stepping forward and addressing* VINICIUS) Sir, take us if you must, but let Father Peter go on.

VINICIUS: What nonsense is this you ask?

JUNIAS: I pray you have respect for his age.

(PETER *puts a restraining hand on* JUNIAS'S *arm, but the latter does not heed it*)

JUNIAS: I am ready to suffer. Let Nero do his worst. But have mercy on this man.

PETER: No. I do not wish it.

JUNIAS: Consider his years, and soften your heart.

(VINICIUS *shakes his head*)

PETER: No! No! I am ready to go back.

VINICIUS: We have orders to arrest all Christians. He himself admitted he is such.

PETER: Yes, I am glad to suffer for my Lord. He died for me.

JUNIAS: Surely you do not think he is responsible for the great fire.

PETRONIUS (*To* VINICIUS) No, I cannot believe this old man is guilty.

VINICIUS: That is not for us to decide. Let him appeal to Nero for a hearing. I am not a judge.

PRISCA: Sir, you know there is no chance to gain a hearing from Nero.

PETER: I want no hearing. I am innocent of every charge but following my Master. To that I am ready to plead guilty.

JUNIAS: I pray you be merciful. Take me in his place. I can make sport for your Emperor.

PETER: You are mad, my son. Cease this pleading. Let us go. I should never have left my flock.

VINICIUS: Yes! Yes! Enough of argument. Move on.

JUNIAS: Most noble sir! Will you not have respect for gray hairs? Remember your own father and relent. Would you wish him to die in the arena?

(VINICIUS *is moved to thought at the mention of his father.* PETER *gives up trying to dissuade* JUNIAS)

PETRONIUS: Your courage befits a Roman, boy. And yours, too, old man. I cannot understand this readiness to meet your fate.

PETER: You know not our Lord, sir. He gave His life for us that we might live eternally.

PETRONIUS: Who is this Lord you speak of?

PETER: Jesus of Nazareth, God's chosen Messiah of our race. He lived and taught in our land. Never man spoke as He did. Still the leaders at Jerusalem hated Him, and they at last had Him crucified. But death could not hold Him. He arose the third day and appeared unto us. He lives with God and reigns over His kingdom.

PETRONIUS: His kingdom? Where is it?

PETER: His kingdom is not like any kingdom of this world, with lands and cities and palaces. His kingdom is made up of those who believe on Him and do His will.

PETRONIUS: Hear you those words, Vinicius?

VINICIUS: Yes. He talks like a man I heard speaking once on a street corner in Rome.

PETRONIUS: His story is strangely interesting. Such a spirit deserves better than to die at Nero's hands. Will you let him go?

VINICIUS: Are you also pleading for his life? You who should stand with me against these pleas!

PETRONIUS: Does he not remind you of your father?

VINICIUS: Enough, Petronius. I suppose you will ask me next to let the others go.

PETRONIUS: No. But remember he is old. Surely it can do no harm to let him go on.

JUNIAS: I pray you heed his words, sir.

VINICIUS (*Reluctantly*) This must never reach Nero's ears.

PETRONIUS: It never will.

VINICIUS: Yes. He can go. Only he must leave here at once.

JUNIAS: The Lord bless you, sir.

PETER (*Raising hands in protest*) No! Your mercy be blessed, but I cannot leave these friends. I must go back.

PRISCA: Sir, may we beg a few moments to persuade him and say farewell.

VINICIUS: Yes. Be quick about it.

PETRONIUS (*To* VINICIUS) Shall we withdraw?

(*Christians withdraw to a little L of center, the guards to the extreme R, where they talk in low tones*)

PETER: Farewell! There is no need of such farewell. I return with you.

PRISCA: No, Father Peter. The Lord has need of you elsewhere.

PETER: Where is there greater need than here in Rome, capital of the Empire? This is my place.

JUNIAS: What chance have you here? Only death awaits you.

PETER: So be it, then. I can die for my Lord.

AQUILA: What good will come of it?

JUNIAS: You know how many of our number have died already. Their death has only whetted Nero's appetite for more.

PETER: Yes, I know. But I believe he will relent and hear our case some day.

JUNIAS: Nero? You know him not. There is no hope from him.

PRISCA: Quite right. Yet who knows what your life can do elsewhere, in Spain perhaps?

AQUILA: Your life is thrice precious. You have seen the Lord.

PETER: Why argue thus? I cannot leave you faithful friends.

AQUILA: Your staying will not save us. Your going may redeem all Spain.

JUNIAS: Remember you are one of the few left who knew our Lord on earth.

PRISCA: He sent you forth to preach His gospel.

PETER: If I only knew what He would have me do!

PRISCA: Who knows but this is His hand, opening the way for you? (PETER *shakes his head slowly*)

AQUILA: Yes, Father. What more certain sign could you ask?

PETER (*Looking up*) Lord, which way?

VINICIUS (*Coming over*) Hasten this farewell. The night is falling.

(PRISCA *meets* VINICIUS *and whispers to him.* VINICIUS *pauses a moment, then reluctantly rejoins* PETRONIUS *at R.* PRISCA *returns to group of Christians*)

PRISCA: This Nero will not live forever.

AQUILA: Some later time you can return and build our church again.

PETER: Should the shepherd leave his sheep to the wolves? No, I cannot do it.

JUNIAS: Why waste your life to appease the hunger of the wolves?

PETER: Son, urge me no more to save my life, lest I yield and grieve my Lord.

JUNIAS (*Falling to his knees before* PETER) Let me take your place and suffer. I can die as well as you.

PETER: I know you will be as faithful to our Lord, but only I can do *my* duty.

PRISCA: Surely this means that we are to give our lives for Him in Rome, and you are called to go.

VINICIUS: Come! Come! Have done with talk. We must hurry.

PRISCA: Father Peter! If you love us, go now.

PETER: Your words weaken my will. If you love me, plead not thus.

JUNIAS: It is because I love you, Father, and our Lord, that I would not have you suffer at the hands of this madman, Nero.

AQUILA: Did not the Master say, "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet"?

PRISCA: Go! Go! Father.

JUNIAS: Yes! Go to preach the Word.

(PETER *is by this time between the other Christians and the guards. The guards cross and step between him and the other three*)

VINICIUS (*To* PETER) There is the road to life. Go your way! (*Turning to* PRISCA, *etc.*) And you! Come with us!

AQUILA: Your blessing, Father!

PETER: Yes! My children.

(*The three kneel quickly, and* PETER *places his hands over their heads*)

PETER: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you and keep you.

PRISCA: The Lord guide your steps, Father. Farewell.

JUNIAS: Farewell.

(AQUILA *leaves weeping, followed by* PRISCA *and* JUNIAS)

VINICIUS: Old man, the favor of the gods be yours.

PETRONIUS: A safe journey, Father.

(*Guards exit to left*)

PETER: The Lord bless you.— (*Looking after them, he raises his hands in prayer*) O Father, go with them. Strengthen their faith that they may glorify Thy Son. And receive them unto Thyself, Lord Jesus! Forgive these Romans and their Emperor. They know not what they do.

(*Turning away from the city he looks to R, then to L in indecision*)

PETER: Lord, have I done aright? What is Thy will? (*Looking toward the city*) Stay?—or— (*Looking toward R*)—Go? Two voices seem to speak. Which is thine, Lord? Stay! Go! (*Looking again toward city*) An end to all my work awaits me there.—Fields ready for the harvest call me there.—Which way? Death would take me to my Lord. Oh, to be with Him again!—Is not life harder? The toil of travel? The scorn of men? Death is too sweet.— (*Looking toward city*) Stay.—

(*Toward R*) Go!—I go! Stop me, Master, if I choose wrongly.

(*He takes a step or two, then turns for a last look at the city*)

PETER: Rome! Rome! Worshiper of false gods!—Thou that killest the prophets, and rejectest them that are sent unto you. Your house is left unto you desolate. Thou shalt not hear the word of the Lord until thou shalt say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.—Oh, come quickly, Lord Jesus.

(*He raises his hands in blessing, then kneels, head bowed, facing toward the city. After a moment he rises slowly and turns to go. As he does so the* VISION *appears in the shadow at R. A spot-light from the opposite wings illumines the figure, coming to full brightness quickly. The step is slow, stately, but sure.* PETER *starts back in amazement as the figure appears*)

PETER: Who are you?—My Lord?—Yes, it is my Lord!—Master, whither goest Thou?

VISION (*Firmly yet sadly*) To Rome, to be recrucified.

(*Slowly the light on the figure fades, and the figure withdraws as invisibly as possible*)

PETER (*Recovering himself*) No! No! My Lord!—Not you again! *My* cross now!

(*He turns and rushes off toward the city*)

CURTAIN

AT THE GATE BEAUTIFUL *

BY

HARRY SILVERNALE MASON

* Selected by the publisher as a one-act play of merit written in the course on the Writing of Religious Drama given by Esther Willard Bates in the Summer School of Religious Drama, Auburn, New York, July 6–24, 1925, under the auspices of the Committee on Drama of the Federal Council of Churches in affiliation with Auburn Theological Seminary. Reprinted by permission of the author and Samuel French, 25 W. 45th Street, New York, from whom the separate edition for 30 cents should always be secured for production purposes. Copyright, 1926, by Samuel French.

CHARACTERS

DEMAS, a vender of idols, from Ephesus. He is a shrewd and crafty man, a defiant hater of Christians. He is interested in religion as a business, not as a belief.

BERITH, a Jewish mother, an unbeliever, who is unhappy and comfortless after a long and futile quest for the healing of her son. She has tried many gods and is still seeking.

ABIGAIL, a Jewish mother, very kindly and sincere. She is a Christian, very firm of faith, and very sympathetic and gentle.

ISSACHAR, a boy of twelve, the son of ABIGAIL, and the playmate of the son of BERITH.

RAAMAH, a cripple who has never walked. He is a middle-aged man and begs for a living near the Beautiful Gate of the Temple.

PETER, a disciple of Jesus. He is rather a common man, about thirty-five or forty years old and probably wears a beard. He is a rugged character but gentle.

JOHN, the beloved disciple, a younger man than PETER, perhaps a little taller. He has dark hair and eyes, some color in his cheeks and is very quiet by nature. His rich spiritual personality and his attentive and understanding glance are always a source of strength and encouragement to PETER. He is silent throughout.

CITIZENS OF JERUSALEM. Any number of people up to ten. They are the people who pass along the street and of whom some go into the Temple. Some as they pass do not stop at all; others pause and listen to the conversation. They may shake their heads, nod to each other, or pass silently along. Some of them may cross the stage more than once, in which case, for the second crossing, they may carry water-jars, bags of dried fruit, or other local commodities.

SINGERS. The choir for the Temple service may be composed of the citizens who go into the Temple, or the church choir may be placed back-stage. The singers do not appear.

AT THE GATE BEAUTIFUL

TIME: *Mid-afternoon, the ninth hour of prayer.*

SCENE: *A street in Jerusalem, in front of the Temple.*

DEMAS *enters L. He has his idols carefully wrapped in a bundle of cloth, which he carries in his arms. He comes along as if seeking the Temple. He looks about him as he walks and finally stops in front of the portico.*

DEMAS: Hm! This the Temple? (*He examines the doorway critically*) This the Beautiful Gate? I call it not so. Would that these Jews could see Diana's glorious temple in my far-away Ephesus. That is beautiful, but this? 'T is only plain and common. (*He takes a few steps for a better view and scans the height and breadth of the building bitterly and derisively*) Jehovah! Jesus! Pah! 'T is a strange and foolish mystery. (*He looks about for a suitable place to display his wares, does not establish himself, but continues to speak*). What sensible person would be foolish enough to worship a god he cannot see? (*Craftily*) Aye, what then becomes of us idol-merchants, when men need no gods to see and touch? They 'd have us starve! (*The shofar sounds within the Temple*) The call to worship? (*He studies the position of the sun*) Yea, it must be about the ninth hour. There 'll be passers-by. Does the Jew, only, know the merchant's craft. Ha! I 'll sell them Diana. (*He establishes himself at a position opposite the Temple gate. He lets down his bundle, spreads out his cloth and arranges his display of gods. He begins his singsong call*) Great is Diana. Great is Diana. (*He is busy with his wares, watches along the street, and stops and looks up as* BERITH *approaches*)

(BERITH *enters, R, and goes to a position in front of* DEMAS)

BERITH: Art thou Demas of Ephesus?

DEMAS: Yea, I am Demas.

BERITH: Hast thou a god to sell?

DEMAS (*Alert and crafty*) Yea, a great god.

BERITH (*Sadly and somewhat hopelessly*) I have tried many gods, yet has my soul not found comfort.

DEMAS: Hast thou Diana?

BERITH: No. Not Diana. (*Eagerly*) Can she heal the sick?

DEMAS (*He is not yet sure to what particular use she desires to put the god*) The sick? Art thou ill?

BERITH: No, I am not ill. My son, my son! Can Diana heal my son?

(DEMAS *takes up an image, comes from behind his wares, up-stage side, and all but thrusts an idol into her hands*)

DEMAS: Great is Diana. Place Diana in the shrine of thy life. Thou hast found healing for thy son and comfort for thy troubled heart. Buy Diana——

BERITH (*Interrupting*) Buy, sayest thou, Demas? Why must one always buy the favor of the gods?

DEMAS (*Professionally*) One golden shekel. Only one golden shekel buys Diana.

BERITH: 'T is too great a price.

DEMAS (*Persuasively*) Is not the comfort thou seekest worth one golden shekel?

(BERITH *takes a money-bag from her girdle, but holds it in her hand, closed*)

BERITH: How easy thou sayest it: "One golden shekel"! (*She counts out the coins, slowly and with hesitation.* DEMAS *watches intently*)

DEMAS: 'T is little to pay for so great a blessing.

BERITH: A golden shekel is a large sum, Demas. (*She shows him the sum in one hand, and holds out the empty money-bag in the other*) See! 'T is all I have.

DEMAS: It will buy the healing of thy son.

BERITH: Art thou sure?

DEMAS: Diana never faileth.

BERITH (*Responding quickly*) The healing of my son! The healing of my son! (*She gives him the money and thrusts the empty bag into her girdle*)

BERITH: The image, the image. Give me Diana.
(*She grasps the idol, fondles it, then hugs it to her breast, comes down-stage, and starts to exit, R*)

BERITH: The healing of my son! The healing of my son!
(*As she turns, she sees* ABIGAIL *and* ISSACHAR *approaching, off-stage. She stops, and quickly hides the image in her dress.* BERITH *remains standing;* ABIGAIL *and* ISSACHAR *enter L, and go toward* BERITH)

ABIGAIL: I am glad to see thee, Berith.
(BERITH *takes a backward step or two and tries to appear unconcerned*)

BERITH: I greet thee, Abigail, and thee, too, Issachar. (*Turns to* ABIGAIL *and speaks enviously*) Thy son is well.

ABIGAIL: Yea, Berith. And thy son? Has the fever left him?

BERITH (*Hugging the idol more closely*) He will be better now.

ABIGAIL (*Noticing the gesture*) What art thou hiding, Berith?

BERITH (*Glancing toward* DEMAS) Nothing. Why?

ABIGAIL (*Following* BERITH'S *glance and seeing* DEMAS *and his idols*) Another new god, Berith?

BERITH (*Starting toward* DEMAS *as if for help*) Demas says this god is great. Diana will heal my son.

ISSACHAR: I wish he were well now, Berith, so that we could go to the fields for bitter herbs.

ABIGAIL (*Going to* BERITH *and placing her hand lovingly on her arm*) O Berith, if only thou wouldst give over thy heartbreaking quest for strange gods.

DEMAS (*Stepping between them, up-stage, and speaking hatefully*) Hater of gods! Curses on thy chattering tongue!

ABIGAIL (*Gently*) Save thy curses for those who will heed them.

DEMAS: Great Diana will heal this woman's son.

ABIGAIL (*To* BERITH) Is Diana, then, thy new god?

DEMAS (*To* ABIGAIL, *simulating surprise*) Hast thou not heard of the power of the great Diana?

(ISSACHAR *looks from one to the other. As he looks around he discovers the idols. He goes over to examine them*)

BERITH (*Taking the image out of her dress and holding it up*) Diana will heal my son.

ABIGAIL (*Turning to* DEMAS) I have not heard of any cures wrought by Diana.

DEMAS (*Sneeringly*) Thou art an ignorant unbeliever.

ABIGAIL (*Quietly but firmly*) Peace, friend. Speak not of what thou art thyself ignorant.

DEMAS (*More respectfully*) I do know that Diana is great.

ABIGAIL (*To* DEMAS, *with uplifted hand*) Christ is greater. (*She turns and speaks kindly to* BERITH) O Berith, poor unhappy mother, put thy faith in Christ. He alone is God.

BERITH: But thy Christ is no longer here.

ABIGAIL: His disciples do many wonders in His holy name.

(*At the mention of the disciples,* ISSACHAR *turns quickly and runs to his mother*)

ISSACHAR: O mother, two of the disciples came to speak to us this morning when we were playing in the market-place.

ABIGAIL: See, Berith. Two of the disciples are here, in Jerusalem. Let Issachar find them and bring them to thee.

DEMAS (*To* BERITH) Heed not the old woman.

BERITH: Peace, Demas. (*To* ABIGAIL) They would not come to the son of a poor woman, Abigail.

DEMAS: Diana is great, while these Judean peasants, what power have they?

ABIGAIL (*Pleading*) Do not listen to him, Berith. Let me send Issachar.

DEMAS (*To* BERITH) Pray to Diana. Thou needest no other god.

BERITH (*Turning to* ABIGAIL *and speaking with indifference*) Trouble not thyself. The child need not go.

ABIGAIL (*To* ISSACHAR) Wouldst thou know these men if thou shouldst see them again?

ISSACHAR: I 'd know them by their kind faces, mother.

ABIGAIL: Then go to the market-place; nay, seek them everywhere and bring me word again.

(ISSACHAR *exits, R*)

DEMAS (*To* BERITH, *warningly*) Have a care, lest thou turn carelessly away from Diana. Pray to her; she will grant thy favor.

BERITH: How long must I pray, Demas? My son, my son! If he should die—Will Diana hear and answer?

DEMAS: Yea, verily. Diana will hear.

ABIGAIL: A piece of clay will never answer.

DEMAS (*To* ABIGAIL, *vehemently*) The curses of Diana smite thee, meddler!

ABIGAIL: I fear not the curses of thy Diana.

DEMAS: Thine own son, Issachar, he is well, think you?

ABIGAIL (*Calmly and with assurance*) Thou sawest him, here by my side but a moment since. Thou knowest that he is well and strong and happy.

BERITH (*Sadly*) Would that my son were well and strong.

DEMAS (*To* BERITH) Healing awaits thy son at the hands of Diana.

ABIGAIL: Believe it not, Berith.

DEMAS (*Turning to* ABIGAIL *fiercely*) Impious skeptic! May the fever-fire of this woman's child kindle its fatal flame in the vitals of thy Issachar.

ABIGAIL (*Quietly*) Thy god has evil power, also? She will render good or evil at thy request?

(DEMAS *retreats in desperation. He goes to his idols, moves some of them spitefully, and comes back to his former position during* ABIGAIL'S *speech*)

ABIGAIL (*To* BERITH, *lovingly*) O Berith, while thou delayest to seek aid from Christ, thy little son draws nearer and nearer to death. Call thou on Christ. He is a God of love; He will surely bless.

DEMAS (*To* ABIGAIL, *hatefully*) Busybody! Go about thine own affairs. (*Turning with gesture toward* BERITH) She trusts in Diana. What is that to thee?

ABIGAIL: Berith needs the power of Christ.

DEMAS (*With bitter sarcasm*) Wise woman, to know the needs of others.

BERITH (*Holding up her idol*) Great is Diana. Great is Diana. (*To* ABIGAIL) Trouble me no more with thy Christ. (*Comes to stage center. She holds out her idol on the palms of her upturned hands. She prays fervently*) Great Diana, look with pity on my breaking heart. All about me is darkness and confusion. I cannot find my way. (*Pause*) Is not the life of my son dearer to me than my own life? And must he die? (*Pause*) Great Diana, kind Diana, hear a mother's plea. Heal my son, heal my son. (*She folds the image in her arms and exits, R*)

DEMAS (*To* ABIGAIL, *boastingly*) Thou seest, busybody? Thou couldst not bring her to thy Christ. Now wilt thou see that Diana is great. Thy Christ! His disciples! (*Snaps his fingers*) Pah! (*Goes back to his idols;* ABIGAIL *stands for a moment, undecided, then slowly starts toward the Temple door. She hears confusion off-stage and stays to see who comes*)

RAAMAH (*Off-stage*) Clumsy fools! Lumbering idiots! (*He is carried on the stage by two men*) Canst thou not walk without shaking a helpless cripple from his couch? Easy I say, or by

all the gods I 'll have thee in chains. (*The men put him down carefully, center, up, and when they have made him comfortable, they pass into the Temple*) Out of the way, louts, and curses on thy stumbling feet!

ABIGAIL (*Coming to the foot of his couch*) They are kind men to carry thee.

RAAMAH: Kind, sayest thou? Kind?

ABIGAIL: Yea, kind; for they bore thee carefully. They do but worry thee because they enjoy thy noisy chatter.

RAAMAH: Those men are dolts, selfish men, and blockheads. They never give me alms. 'T is thou hast the kind heart. Alms, alms. Pity my infirmity. Alms, alms.

ABIGAIL: I do pity thee.

RAAMAH: Save thy pity, woman. That will not fill my empty stomach.

DEMAS (*Singsong*) Great is Diana. Great is Diana, Great——

RAAMAH: Hey, neighbor. Have done thy song, thou——

DEMAS: 'T is not a song, 't is my——

RAAMAH: Then keep it for thyself, whatever it is, and share thy gold. Alms, good sir, alms. (*Holding out his hands*)

DEMAS: I have no gold for beggars.

RAAMAH: Thy wares, then. One of thy fine beauties will bring a good round sum.

DEMAS: Speakest thou thus of Diana?

RAAMAH: Heathen wretch, what care I for thy Diana?

DEMAS: She 'll make thy hands as helpless as thy feet. She can do thee harm.

RAAMAH: Harm? There spakest thou truly. 'T is what gods are for—to do harm.

DEMAS: Hadst thou Diana, thou wouldst——

RAAMAH: I want not Diana. Gold I want, not gods.

ABIGAIL: Is it gold only thou dost want?

RAAMAH (*Expectantly*) Yea, gold. Kind, bright coins. I 'd shake them, so (*Gesture, as if shaking coins in his hands*), and hear them tinkle; then I 'd look at them (*Gesture, opening his hands*) and see them glitter. Alms, alms. (*He holds out his empty hands*)

ABIGAIL: Gold, only?

RAAMAH: Yea, gold. (*Looking toward* DEMAS) 'T is better than gods.

ABIGAIL: O sir, because thou thinkest always of gold, thy heart is withered.

RAAMAH: Humph! My heart will wither if I get no alms.

ABIGAIL: Nay, thy whole life is miserable.

RAAMAH (*Pauses, then speaks*) Yea (*Sadly*), 't is miserable.

ABIGAIL: Thou shouldst think of other things, desire other things.

RAAMAH: What could I desire more than gold?

ABIGAIL: The healing of thy helpless feet.

RAAMAH: My helpless feet?

ABIGAIL: Made strong.

RAAMAH: My helpless feet? Made strong? That can never be.

ABIGAIL: I believe that thou couldst walk.

RAAMAH: I walk, who have never taken my first step? Do not jest.

ABIGAIL: I speak sincerely.

RAAMAH: As soon could these stones bear grapes or the sun set in yonder east.

(DEMAS *has been listening to the conversation. He now comes up to them*)

DEMAS: Diana can heal thee.

ABIGAIL: The Son of God. He alone can heal.

RAAMAH (*Gleefully*) Oho! A woman dealer in gods!

ABIGAIL: Thou dost not understand.

RAAMAH (*Pointing to* DEMAS) He hath a god to sell. (*To* ABIGAIL) Thou hast a god—and I—I have empty hands.

DEMAS: I cannot give my gods away.

ABIGAIL: I have no gods to sell.

RAAMAH (*Disgusted*) Riddles, riddles, speak ye both. I ask an alms; thou givest me only words.

DEMAS: It taketh words to explain a god.

ABIGAIL: Words are helpless things. It is what thou believest in thy heart that rules thy life.

RAAMAH: I do not understand. What meanest thou?

ABIGAIL: If thou wouldst believe on the Son of God, thy feet might be made whole.

RAAMAH: And nothing to pay?

ABIGAIL: Thou speakest always of money?

RAAMAH: How shall I believe? Who will teach me?

ABIGAIL: Would that Peter were here, or John, the Beloved Disciple. Issachar, my son, saw them in the market place this morning.

RAAMAH: They 'd pass me by.

ABIGAIL: The pity would be that thou wouldst ask only for alms.

RAAMAH (*Interested*) Thinkest thou, then, that they would notice me and pity my infirmity?

ABIGAIL: Their only work is doing good.

RAAMAH: Should they come, I might listen. I do not know——

ABIGAIL: They may not come. (*She turns as if to leave him*)

RAAMAH (*Reaching toward her*) Thy son, said he not that he saw them this very day?

ABIGAIL: He said he saw two of the disciples. (*Turns back toward him*) I am sure they must still be in the city, ministering peace and blessing in the name and power of the blessed Christ. Oh, that they would come to thee!

RAAMAH (*Sadly*) Nay, nay. Who would come to a helpless cripple? Verily, are not all gods far away?

DEMAS (*Pointing off stage, L and R*) See! Here be people coming! Now to sell Diana. (*Goes back to his idols. People begin to pass.* DEMAS *raises his singsong cry and watches alertly, holding up an idol now and then and trying to attract attention*)

RAAMAH: Yea, to business. (*Turning to* DEMAS) Thou and I must work. (*To* ABIGAIL) Out of my way, woman. I 'd see people as they come so that I may choose out the generous ones. I 'll have alms, I 'll warrant, long before I have gods. (*He looks along the street and speaks to* ABIGAIL) I wonder if the disciples will come? (*More people pass; he watches intently*)

ABIGAIL: Have patience, sir; have patience.

RAAMAH: Patience? Alms were better. (*He again looks down the street*) See, is not that thy son?

ABIGAIL (*Looking*) Yea, 't is he. What word does he bring, I wonder?

ISSACHAR (*Enters from right, runs to* ABIGAIL) O mother, they are gone. I found them not.

RAAMAH: Foolish me, to waste my time in idle talk. (*People pass*) Alms, alms. Behold my infirmity and have pity. Alms, alms. (*Some of the passers-by give* RAAMAH *money. Some notice him by word or gesture of greeting. Some pass and do not notice him. Sound of chanting comes from within the Temple.* DEMAS *raises his singsong in loud defiant tones. As* ABIGAIL *and* ISSACHAR *turn toward the Temple,* ISSACHAR *discovers the two disciples approaching. By a gesture, he calls the attention of his mother. Together* ABIGAIL *and* ISSACHAR *come back toward* RAAMAH'S *couch, just as* PETER *and* JOHN *enter, L. They are talking quietly together as they walk and do not look up until* RAAMAH *asks an alms. The chanting within ceases*)

RAAMAH (*Extending his empty hands and pleading*) Alms, kind sir, alms. Have pity on a poor cripple.

(*The disciples stop and look at* RAAMAH. ABIGAIL *goes*

to RAAMAH *and tells him silently and with gesture that these men are the disciples. He does not heed her.*

Merciful and kind sirs, alms, alms.

(*While the men still stand,* ABIGAIL *tells* RAAMAH *again who the men are. He pushes her away and says*)

Give, sirs, give.

(PETER *and* JOHN *now walk slowly to* RAAMAH'S *couch, and stand, separated at its foot*)

PETER: "Silver and gold have I none."

RAAMAH: Even a penny, even a penny.

PETER: "Such as I have, give I thee."

RAAMAH (*Bewildered*) Thou hast nothing, yet dost thou give?

PETER: Thou art a cripple?

RAAMAH: Yea. A helpless cripple, as thou seest.

PETER: For many years?

RAAMAH: I have never walked.

PETER: How dost thou earn thy daily bread?

RAAMAH: Here at the Temple gate I lie. Day after day I hold out empty hands and beg an alms. When folk are kind and generous, then I have a good day. But often they heed me not and give me nothing (*Sadly*) Then is this my couch the harder, because of hunger and bitter loneliness.

(PETER *is silent, and* RAAMAH *tries to watch the effect of his plea. He looks at his empty hands. People pass and gather near.* PETER *goes up to the couch and speaks sincerely*)

PETER: Hast thou heard of Christ?

RAAMAH: Yea, I have heard of Christ. This woman (*Indicating* ABIGAIL) hath but now been telling me of Him.

PETER: What said she?

RAAMAH: She told me that if I did but believe in Christ, there would come the healing of my helpless feet.

PETER: Believest thou this?

RAAMAH (*Honestly*) At first I jeered and mocked. But then,—she seemed so earnest and kind, I wondered if I could be healed. Oh, that I could be healed!

PETER: Hath it been told thee how Jesus healed the lame man at Bethesda's Pool, here in Jerusalem?

RAAMAH: Here? In Jerusalem? Healed a lame man? (*Reaching his hand toward* PETER) Tell me, sir, tell me.

PETER (*Moving back from the couch a few steps*) Now there is by the sheep-gate a pool of water. Sometimes an angel troubles the water (RAAMAH *raises his hands in wonder*), and when the waters move, he who first steps down into them is healed of whatsoever infirmity he hath.

RAAMAH (*Interrupting*) I cannot walk. How could I step into the waters?

PETER: Hear the rest of the story.

RAAMAH (*Reverently and with wonder*) Came the lame man into the pool?

PETER: Nay. Listen. At all times multitudes of the sick and afflicted either came or were brought to these healing waters. One Sabbath day Jesus came. He walked about among the suffering ones until He came to a man who was lying, helpless, just as you lie here.

RAAMAH: Did Jesus have compassion on him? A helpless man, like me?

PETER: Yea, Jesus had compassion. He said to the helpless one, "Wilt thou be made whole?" The lame man answered, "Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool."

RAAMAH: Did Jesus carry him into the waters?

PETER: Jesus had no need to carry him into the waters.

RAAMAH: And yet thou sayest that Jesus healed him?

PETER: Jesus saith unto him, "Rise, take up thy bed, and walk."

RAAMAH (*With a hush of awe*) Rise? Walk?

PETER: "And immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed, and walked."

RAAMAH: 'T is marvelous and wonderful. (*Pause; then, to* PETER) Could any god be as great as He?

PETER: Nay, for He is "King of kings and Lord of lords."

RAAMAH: Oh, sirs, that I had been there! I would have rejoiced to see a man as helpless as I made strong again.

PETER: Thou wouldst have asked nothing for thyself?

RAAMAH (*Humbly*) I am unworthy to ask.

PETER: Why speakest thou thus, so sadly?

RAAMAH: How dare I, who have made light of all gods and have mocked and jeered at thy kind Christ, how dare I ask for mercy?

PETER: If thou dost penitently confess thy sin, it shall be forgiven thee.

RAAMAH (*Wringing his hands*) It was wrong. It was wrong. I knew not what I did. (*He bows his head*) That I should have blasphemed the name of the blessed Christ!

PETER: Trouble not thyself, friend. If thou wilt ask it of God, he will forgive thee.

RAAMAH: Oh, that I might yet be able to praise God!

PETER: If one or two should come as His messengers, ministering in His holy name, wouldst thou believe?

RAAMAH (*Humbly*) Yea, master.

PETER: Thou wouldst not doubt?

RAAMAH: I would not doubt thee.

PETER: Why hast thou so much confidence in me?

RAAMAH (*Confidently*) I can tell thee. My heart tells me that thou hast been with Christ.

PETER (*Raising both hands, reverently*) Aye, with the blessed Christ.

RAAMAH: I know it by the beauty and peace of thy countenance.

(RAAMAH *is silent for a space. He looks away, then back again to* PETER. *Pleading earnestly, he says*)

Oh, sir, can you not touch my life and make me better?

PETER: "Look on us."

(RAAMAH *looks, questioningly, from* PETER *to* JOHN, *then at* PETER *again*).

RAAMAH: Yea, masters, I am looking. What then?

PETER: "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth——"

RAAMAH: In the name of Jesus Christ? I know ye are the men of God.

(BERITH *comes hurrying in. She holds the idol tightly clasped in both hands. She is going to* DEMAS. *She sees* PETER *and* JOHN *and stops suddenly.* DEMAS *beckons her to come to him, but she does not heed him. She watches intently*)

PETER: "Rise up, and walk."

RAAMAH (*Bewildered*) I, rise up? And walk?

PETER: Rise!

RAAMAH (*Looks from* JOHN *to* PETER, *his hands outspread*) Help me, sirs; help me.

(JOHN, *with his right hand, takes* RAAMAH'S *left;* PETER, *with his left, takes* RAAMAH'S *right.* RAAMAH *looks from one to the other, then at his helpless feet. Again he looks intently into the faces of the disciples. Now he looks steadfastly at* PETER. PETER *slowly raises his right hand in the gesture of pointing upward.* RAAMAH *looks up, following* PETER'S *gesture. Troubled at first,* RAAMAH *is now hopeful. Leaning on the hands of* PETER *and* JOHN *for support, he slowly swings his feet clear of the couch. Then, aided by the disciples, he slowly comes to a standing position. Still leaning on them, he carefully slides one foot along the floor, then the other. He takes a few shuffling steps. Then he releases the hands of* PETER *and* JOHN *and takes a few steps alone. Now he raises his arms in a gesture of rejoicing and raises a glad cry*)

RAAMAH: I can walk! I can walk! (*He walks a few steps away from the Temple, then turns about, and, stepping with firm and confident tread, he starts to go into the Temple. He pauses to speak his gratitude to* PETER *and* JOHN) I have received the blessing of God at your hands. (*Now he goes into the Temple, saying joyfully*) Glory to Jesus Christ! Praises to the holy name of Christ. Glory to the God of all gods. Glory to the blessed name of Jesus Christ. (*His voice dies away in the Temple*)

(DEMAS *has intently watched every move. As* RAAMAH *goes into the Temple, he quickly gathers his idols into a careless bundle and slinks away.*

BERITH, *after* DEMAS *has gone, still stands amazed. The disciples do not notice her until the sound of* RAAMAH'S *voice has died away.* JOHN *sees her first and touches* PETER'S *arm. Together they turn toward her and* PETER *beckons. She takes an undecided step toward them and stops. Now she holds the idol high and sends it crashing to the ground. Folding her hands in humble entreaty, she walks slowly and kneels at the feet of* PETER *and* JOHN)

BERITH (*Pleading*) My son. My son.

(*After an instant for tableau, chanting within the Temple, which continues until after the curtain is down*)

CURTAIN

BARABBAS *

BY

DOROTHY LEAMON

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CHARACTERS

BARABBAS. The thief who was released in the place of Jesus. A man of thirty or so, whose experience has stamped itself into hard lines on his face, but whose eyes show a depth of soul not yet fathomed. He is at least of average height, broad-shouldered and erect, and has the confident air of a natural leader of men.

TORAS. Close friend and companion of BARABBAS, but older and more hardened. He is a keen observer of men and their actions, but is somewhat sullen and lacks the power to inspire others.

SIMEON. A sly old fellow of sixty; he has a sinister, calculating expression, together with a cackling, mirthless laugh.

THADDEUS. The fourth member of the robber band, about the age of BARABBAS. He is moody and changeable, prone to distrust the motives of others.

HAMATH. The youngest member of the band, a tall slender lad of twenty, who has not yet gained confidence in himself.

MARY MAGDALENE. A woman of thirty-five or forty, possesses attractiveness of expression, dignity of bearing, and richness of character.

BARABBAS

TIME: *In the early dawn of Resurrection Day.*

SCENE: *Along the road leading from Jerusalem to the tomb of Jesus. The spot is dismal and bare. At L, up-stage, are a few thorn-bushes, large enough to conceal a person who should wish a hiding-place. At R, up-stage, are several large rocks, back of which one might hide or against which one might lean. Down-stage, at extreme R and L, are small thorn-bushes. At R center is found a rock, large enough to be used as a seat.*

At the beginning of the action, SIMEON *and* THADDEUS *are at L, gambling with coins and dice.* THADDEUS *is seated on the rock;* SIMEON, *at his right, sits on the ground with his legs crossed. At the back, R, is* TORAS, *leaning against one of the large rocks and idly tossing a few coins which he has taken from the pouch at his waist.*

The game proceeds in silence for a moment before HAMATH *enters from the left. He saunters over to center, yawns lazily, then drops down full length on the ground to watch the progress of the game.*

SIMEON (*Collects the coins just given him and rubs his hands delightedly*) Good! Good! Come on, now! (*Tosses*) So? So? (*Pays deliberately*)

THADDEUS (*Tosses. Scowls and shakes his head*) One more like that ends it for me, Simeon.

SIMEON (*Tosses. Pays*) Not so bad, eh, Thaddeus?

THADDEUS (*Tosses impatiently, flings down his last coins, and stalks over toward the left*) I might have known it. Luck never favors me!

HAMATH (*Sitting up*) Your last shekel, Thaddeus?

(THADDEUS *stands digging the ground viciously with his toe while* SIMEON *scrambles about, gathering up the coins in a small skin pouch. As he picks up the last coin, he looks at it, then at* THADDEUS, *and hobbles over to offer him the coin.* THADDEUS *angrily knocks the coin to the ground.* SIMEON *picks it up*)

THADDEUS (*Bitterly*) I would rather starve!

TORAS (*Swaggering down center*) Starve? So? (*Turning to* SIMEON) Friend Thaddeus would rather starve than take what did not belong to him, eh, Simeon? A fine thief he will make some of these days! (*Laughs ironically*)

HAMATH (*Seated*) Starve we all shall, if we stay much longer in this deserted spot. No travelers ever come this way.

TORAS: All the better for us, Hamath, I dare say.

SIMEON: It may be, Toras, that young Hamath prefers Jerusalem to-day.

HAMATH: Jerusalem? Not I. (*Rising*) You know right well, Simeon, that Jerusalem is no place for robbers these days. This last crucifixion has so affrighted men that they keep well within doors.

TORAS: Except now and then! But at that he who yielded up this was pale enough! (*Holding up his bag of coins*)

HAMATH: And did you dare to rob at such a time, Toras? After the Temple veil had been rent and such terrible sights were seen in the streets of the city?

SIMEON: And after young Hamath and brave Thaddeus had taken to their heels? (*Laughs and nudges* TORAS)

HAMATH (*Shrugging his shoulders and trying to assume a careless manner*) Well, now at least, thanks to your boldness, Toras, we have silver enough for food. Almost three days have passed since I have seen enough to eat!

TORAS (*Replacing the pouch at his belt*) So? What is the matter with your own right arm, Hamath? Steal for yourself, you lazy dog!

THADDEUS (*Turning quickly to face* TORAS) That is your scheme, is it?

TORAS: Scheme? What do you——

THADDEUS: Every man for himself, is it? (*Slowly*) I—think—I—understand!

TORAS: Understand what? Out with it!

THADDEUS: The reason for Barabbas keeping so well out of our sight. He never intended to meet us here! You know it full well!

SIMEON: Stay, stay, my lad! Have patience. It is but early yet, and you know Barabbas must needs be cautious.

TORAS: Barabbas gave his word. You know as well as I, Thaddeus, that Barabbas never goes back on his word.

THADDEUS: Gave his word? Yea, and to whom? To you, and to Simeon, perhaps. And now you two are trying to——

TORAS: Have a care, Thaddeus; have a care. Why should he not give his word to me? Did I not stand by him when the rest of you took to your heels? Is he not the best friend I have in the world? Have we not grown up together? Starved, stolen, been imprisoned together? Ah, he's worth a dozen cowards like you!

THADDEUS: Coward? I? (*His fists clenched, ready to fight*)

TORAS: You know you are, Thaddeus. And you know the kind of a man Barabbas is. Did I not see him that morning in prison, when we thought every hour would be his last? I saw him watch the Roman guard take the other two lads out to be crucified, and he never changed an eye! Not he, though he knew his turn was next! "Tell the men," said he, "tell the men to keep it up to the end. I'll show them how a robber chief can die!"

(THADDEUS, *slightly ashamed of his outburst, seats himself on the rock at L, and drops his head in his hands.* SIMEON *stands at L leaning on his staff and listening intently.* HAMATH *drops down on the ground, a little to the right*

of and facing TORAS. *During the next speech,* BARABBAS *enters at L, up-stage, and stands there, unobserved by the men*)

HAMATH: Go on, Toras; tell us the rest.

TORAS: It was nearing the third hour when one of the guards came back. He looked at us both rather strangely, then beckoned to me to depart. But scarcely had I reached the prison door when his voice came like a thunderbolt, saying, "It has been decreed, Barabbas, that the Jewish impostor, Jesus, shall be crucified, and that you shall be released in his stead!" "Released!" I cried, "Barabbas released?" and would have rushed to greet him, had not the guard pushed me aside roughly and bade me begone. "Outside the city wall!" called Barabbas. "Meet me outside the city wall." So here we are, my lads, and here we stay, until——

THADDEUS: But, Toras, that was all of three days ago. Time enough in which to have found us.

HAMATH: Yea, he may have found better friends by now.

TORAS: Better friends! Where could Barabbas find better friends than——

BARABBAS (*Coming down center and putting a hand on the shoulder of* TORAS) Ah, where could I, indeed?

(HAMATH *and* THADDEUS *spring to their feet*)

TORAS: Barabbas! Barabbas! I knew you would come!

BARABBAS: When did we ever prove unfaithful, one to another, friend Toras? (*Turning to* SIMEON) And old Simeon, it is indeed good to see you after these weary months. (*Going over to* THADDEUS) How now, Thaddeus? You look pale. One would think you had been imprisoned, likewise. Come, Hamath, greet your old friend. (HAMATH *joins* BARABBAS *and* THADDEUS) Is all well with you, my lads?

HAMATH: Nothing goes well, Barabbas, when you are not with us.

(SIMEON *joins* TORAS *at right center, up-stage*)

THADDEUS: Chance always seems to favor Simeon and Toras.

BARABBAS: And old Toras has made you stand by the law, "Steal nothing, eat nothing!" Is it not so? (HAMATH *and* THADDEUS *are embarrassed and silent*) You are hungry. You are penniless. That is nothing. So am I hungry and penniless. But one thing remains: back to the old life! Come, let us look about!

HAMATH: This spot is no good.

THADDEUS: No travelers ever come this way.

BARABBAS: Then try elsewhere, while Toras and I stay here. Simeon, go with these lads down to the right of yon turn in the road. (*Points off L*)

SIMEON (*Coming center*) Aye, aye, near the olive-trees.

BARABBAS: Some rich traveler is sure to pass ere long. But keep close watch for the Roman guard.

HAMATH: And report here?

BARABBAS: At the end of the watch, unless chance favors you before.

THADDEUS: Come, Hamath, let us show our skill. Something tells me that chance is with us to-day. (THADDEUS *and* HAMATH *rush out, followed by old* SIMEON, *hobbling with his staff*)

TORAS (*Watches the group scornfully*) Fine robbers they will make! You should have seen the way they took to their heels the day of the crucifixion!

BARABBAS: Not Simeon?

TORAS: Nay, he is bold enough, but his age makes him slow and weak.

BARABBAS: I know; I know. But we must all keep together now. Only five of us left. (*Pause.* TORAS *nods his head*) We are going to miss the lads we have just lost, Toras.

TORAS: Miss them, aye. It has almost gotten the better of Hamath and Thaddeus. They won't talk about it.

BARABBAS (*Crosses R*) And did you—see them again, Toras?

TORAS: Aye.

BARABBAS: On the crosses?

TORAS: Aye. Watched it all to the end.

BARABBAS: And they died like—brave men?

TORAS (*Taking a step or two to L and pointing off-stage to the left*) You can almost see the crosses from here. Come, look! (BARABBAS *comes to the side of* TORAS) The big cross was for Jesus. The one on the right was for old Matthias, and the other for young Nathan, of course.

(BARABBAS *gazes as if fascinated*)

TORAS: Old Matthias kept up to the last, blaspheming and cursing his ill luck, but the young lad—— (TORAS *shakes his head*)

BARABBAS: Yea, young Nathan, Toras, what of him?

TORAS: He weakened. Did not like the way old Matthias laughed at Jesus. Told him so. Seemed willing enough to accept his punishment. I never thought he would give in like that.

BARABBAS: He was but a boy, Toras.

TORAS: Then after a while he turned to talk to Jesus.

BARABBAS: To Jesus? Don't you remember, Toras, he always did want to follow Jesus? Used to run off from the rest of us whenever he got a chance, just to hear Him talk.

TORAS: I remember. We had to call him back.

BARABBAS: And did you hear what they said?

TORAS: Not all. There was so much noise. About all I could hear was Jesus saying to him something about being with Him that day in Paradise. At any rate it seemed to make him feel better, for he was quiet after that. But old Matthias, he never gave in, not he! (TORAS *laughs and slaps his knee*)

BARABBAS (*Thoughtfully*) So Nathan followed Jesus, after all, did he? (*Stands gazing at the three crosses*)

(TORAS *watches* BARABBAS *sharply for a moment, then goes slowly up-stage in front of the thorn-bushes, where he stands with arms folded and eyes narrowed trying to understand the trend of the thoughts of* BARABBAS)

BARABBAS (*Slowly*) That big cross—that big cross—would have been mine if—if (*Pause*)—and He did not even deserve it!

(TORAS *starts to play with his bag of coins, tossing it up and down. The jingle arouses* BARABBAS, *who comes to himself with a start*)

BARABBAS: Why, I—why, Toras—why, this is indeed a forsaken spot. After all, it may not be wise to remain here.

TORAS: You think so?

BARABBAS: What say you to moving on? (*They start to go*)

TORAS (*Listening intently*) Stay! Do you not hear? Some one comes! (*Takes a step or two to R*)

BARABBAS (*Looking off, L*) So? So? Ah, I can see. (*Motions to* TORAS *to hide*) O-ho! only a woman. Still, even a woman may— (*He steps back*) She has something in her hand, Toras. It may be worth the trouble! (*He leans carelessly against the rock, up-stage right, as* MARY MAGDALENE *enters, carrying in her hands an alabaster cruse of ointment*)

(MARY MAGDALENE *advances with firm step, her precious cruse held in both hands, level with her breast.* BARABBAS *takes a few quick steps down R and places himself directly in front of her, blocking her progress*)

MARY MAGDALENE: What is it, my friend?

(BARABBAS *stands for a moment, hands on hips, as if to intimidate her, then insolently reaches out a hand for the cruse*)

BARABBAS: What have you there?

MARY MAGDALENE: This? (*Indicating the cruse*)

BARABBAS: Aye, it is worth a pretty penny, is it not?

MARY MAGDALENE (*Slowly*) This alabaster cruse? Why——

BARABBAS: Do you give it to me?

MARY MAGDALENE: Nay, sir, I cannot.

BARABBAS: Or do I take it?

MARY MAGDALENE (*Tenderly*) You do not understand.

BARABBAS: Understand?

MARY MAGDALENE: This contains rich ointment, sweet with myrrh and spice.

BARABBAS: And what of that?

MARY MAGDALENE: And I am Mary Magdalene. I go to anoint the dead body of my Lord and King!

BARABBAS: King? What king, pray?

MARY MAGDALENE: Jesus, the Christ, who was crucified!

BARABBAS (*Falling back*) Jesus! Crucified!

MARY MAGDALENE (*Sympathetically*) You knew Jesus, too?

BARABBAS (*Shaking his head*) I never knew Him.

MARY MAGDALENE: You never knew Him? Never knew what a wonderful Friend He was?

BARABBAS: I—I had a friend who knew Him.

MARY MAGDALENE: A disciple?

BARABBAS (*Shaking his head*) My friend was crucified—two days ago.

MARY MAGDALENE: Two days ago—oh, no—oh—your friend—your friend—was he crucified with Jesus?

BARABBAS: The young lad Nathan.

MARY MAGDALENE: I remember. He spoke so kindly to Jesus when every one was so cruel.

BARABBAS: They tell me so.

MARY MAGDALENE: And you, friend, may I not know your name?

BARABBAS (*Turning from her a little*) I—I am Barabbas.

MARY MAGDALENE: Barabbas! (*Draws away from him a step*) Whom Pilate released instead— (*Gives a pathetic little cry*) Oh.

(BARABBAS *shrugs his shoulders, but lowers his eyes and is silent.* MARY MAGDALENE *looks at him a moment, too full of emotion to speak. Then she turns slowly until she can see the three crosses in the distance. Her eyes come back*

to the cruse of ointment in her hands. She is thinking of Christ's suffering and death. One hand goes to her throat as she holds the cruse close to her heart, and she makes a brave effort to keep control of her feelings.

MARY MAGDALENE: You live; you are free to come and go as you will; while He—He has suffered so.

BARABBAS (*Sullenly*) My life, is it not as good as another's?

MARY MAGDALENE (*Approaching* BARABBAS) Forgive me, Barabbas. I do you wrong. The Master would not have me reproach you. He has died that you might live. Why—perhaps—you have but changed places with Him, Barabbas. He has died in your stead and you can live for Him.

BARABBAS: Live for Him? I think I do not understand.

MARY MAGDALENE (*With a smile*) His way is not so hard to understand, but sometimes it is oh, so hard to follow. He would have you be a good friend to others, Barabbas; as good a friend to others as He has been to you.

BARABBAS (*Puzzled*) Jesus, a Friend to me?

MARY MAGDALENE (*Crosses R in front of* BARABBAS, *her face illumined*) "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." (*Turning L toward* BARABBAS) "And ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you." His very words, Barabbas. Will you not be His friend, too?

(MARY MAGDALENE *watches* BARABBAS *earnestly for a moment, then turns R, and, with her head held high, goes on her way to the tomb*)

BARABBAS (*Trying to understand*) "His life for his friends, for his friends." I wonder——

(TORAS *steps out of his hiding-place and watches* BARABBAS *scornfully, then walks over toward him, catches him roughly by the shoulder, and turns him around*)

TORAS: Fool!

BARABBAS (*Angered at* TORAS, *he draws back his arm as if to strike*) Fool? I—(*Unclenches his fist and drops his eyes in shame*)—

I guess you are right, Toras. (*He goes over to the rock, L, and sits down, leaning his head on his hand*)

TORAS: Barabbas! Barabbas! You are not yourself. Come, let us get away from here.

BARABBAS: Oh, Toras, let us give it up! This stealing never gets us anywhere. You know that.

TORAS: Give it up? What 's the matter with you?

BARABBAS: Oh, I wish I knew, Toras!

TORAS: You, Barabbas, you, the brave robber chief! (*Laughs ironically*) This is good! Repenting his misdeeds! Ha, ha! (BARABBAS *is silent*)

TORAS: If it were young Nathan now—but Barabbas! (*His manner changes. He goes over to* BARABBAS, *puts a hand on his shoulder*) Come on, old fellow; it has been too much for you, prison, those crosses, and that woman! Let us go.

BARABBAS (*Rising*) And you will give it up?

TORAS: Give what up?

BARABBAS: This life of ours.

TORAS: The life of a robber? I 'll be hanged if I will.

BARABBAS: Then it is the parting of the ways, Toras. You have been the best friend in the world, and I would we could stay together.

TORAS: You are deserting us?

BARABBAS: Aye, Toras, unless you want to come with me.

TORAS: Never.

BARABBAS (*Grasps one hand of* TORAS *in both of his*) Then peace be with you, friend Toras. You will tell the men I could not go on? (*He starts to go off at R*)

(*Shouts are heard at L.* BARABBAS *stops instinctively, but does not turn around.* HAMATH *rushes in with a bag of gold and runs over to* BARABBAS. *Close behind are* THADDEUS, *with another bag of gold, and old* SIMEON, *who stop to talk with* TORAS)

HAMATH: Gold! Gold! Barabbas!

THADDEUS: Look! Gold for many a day!

SIMEON: Aye, Toras. No need to call them cowards now! You could have no better. (*He stops short, conscious that something has happened*)

(BARABBAS *is standing with arms folded, his back to the rest of the men.* HAMATH *is trying to get his attention*)

HAMATH: Three wayfarers, Barabbas! Do you hear? (*Turns to* TORAS *for an explanation*)

THADDEUS: What has happened? (*He looks at* TORAS)

SIMEON: Speak, Toras. Is it a quarrel?

TORAS (*Pointing to* BARABBAS) Let him tell you.

(BARABBAS *is silent.* SIMEON *starts to go over to him*)

TORAS: He is afraid!

THADDEUS: Afraid?

SIMEON: Of what?

TORAS: Afraid to face the men he is deserting.

HAMATH: Deserting?

SIMEON: What do you mean?

THADDEUS: Tell us, Toras, if Barabbas will not speak to us.

TORAS: A woman came by with a cruse of precious ointment which would have brought us many a good shekel at the market. Barabbas asked her for it! Think of it: asked her for it! Then when she refused, he let her keep it.

SIMEON: Ha, ha! a woman!

TORAS: Then she talked to him about Jesus, and now his old friends are not good enough for him.

HAMATH: Not good enough?

THADDEUS: Does he mean to betray us?

BARABBAS: Nay, nay, men. It is not that. No man ever had better friends.

TORAS: Then you have changed your mind? You are coming with us?

BARABBAS: No, Toras.

SIMEON: Why not, Barabbas?

BARABBAS: She said that Jesus died for me because He was my Friend.

THADDEUS: Well? (*He is bewildered by the idea*)

BARABBAS: He did not deserve to die, while I—I have been wicked enough, God knows.

TORAS: But that is all past, Barabbas. Come on, and enjoy life while you may.

BARABBAS: Can you not see? Can not any of you see that I must not go on with you?

SIMEON: He has lost his senses.

TORAS: Just like young Nathan. They are all going mad!

THADDEUS: Come on, Hamath; let us begone.

HAMATH: Aye, leave him here alone. We need no help from him. (HAMATH *and* THADDEUS *go out arm in arm.* SIMEON *follows them off L, calling,* "Come on, Toras; come on; come on!" TORAS *stands, with arms folded, looking sternly at* BARABBAS, *who has reached out his hand in pleading*)

BARABBAS: You are all going?

TORAS: Aye, Barabbas; we are all going.

BARABBAS: If you would but stay, Toras, we might go back to Galilee. It is easy to live honest there.

TORAS: To Galilee? O-ho! Not for me, Barabbas.

BARABBAS: I shall miss you, Toras.

TORAS: And Jerusalem will miss you, I dare say, Barabbas. (*Laughs scornfully*) I shall tell them. Ha, ha! I shall tell them they may find an honest thief in Galilee! (*He bows himself off L*)

(BARABBAS *takes two or three steps toward L as if he would follow the men, then comes back to R center to a place from which he can see the three crosses*)

BARABBAS: "Greater love—greater love hath no man than this—" (*He goes over to the rock, L, drops down on the ground beside it, and raises his hands to heaven*)

BARABBAS: God have mercy, have mercy upon me! (*He prostrates himself, his head and arms on the rock*)

(*In a moment,* MARY MAGDALENE *appears at R. She is breathless and excited, and comes hurrying in, as if looking for some one. She stops a moment as she sees* BARABBAS, *but goes on past him. She stops again after a step or two, then rushes swiftly back to him*)

MARY MAGDALENE: Barabbas! Is it you?

BARABBAS (*Looks up*) Mary? (*Rises*) Mary Magdalene!

MARY MAGDALENE (*Joyfully*) Have you heard? Have you heard the good tidings?

BARABBAS: Nay, I have heard nothing.

MARY MAGDALENE: He is risen! He is risen from the dead!

BARABBAS: Jesus?

MARY MAGDALENE: Aye, Jesus.

BARABBAS: You are sure?

MARY MAGDALENE: I saw Him! I talked with Him! He called me by name!

BARABBAS: Where?

MARY MAGDALENE: In the garden near the sepulchre. And I knew Him not until He spake my name.

BARABBAS: Truly, He is indeed the Messiah.

MARY MAGDALENE: Yea, and the Son of God!

BARABBAS (*He is silent a moment, his face aglow*) And He is my Friend, too!

MARY MAGDALENE: Of a truth He is! But I cannot tarry here, for I must go and tell His disciples.

(MARY MAGDALENE *turns and goes out L.* BARABBAS *reaches out a hand as if he would stay her, but she is gone.*

He looks eagerly about, expecting to see the Christ any moment)

BARABBAS: Master! (*He pauses for the answer which fails to come*) Master! (*He goes upstage and looks off beyond the thornbushes. Suddenly he turns as if he heard a voice off R.*) MASTER! (*His voice vibrant with new-found joy, his arm outstretched with eagerness, he goes off toward the garden near the sepulchre*)

THE SHEPHERDS *

BY

MARSHALL N. GOOLD

* Published separately by The Century Co. for 15 cents, the edition which should always be secured for production purposes.

CHARACTERS

JETHRO
REUEL, JETHRO'S brother } Shepherds
DAVID, JETHRO'S son

JOSEPH, a carpenter of Nazareth
ZEBEDEE, a fisherman from Galilee
MARY, the mother of Jesus
SALOME, MARY'S sister, the wife of ZEBEDEE
A Roman Soldier

THE SHEPHERDS

Scene I

TIME: *Early afternoon.*

SCENE: *On the plains north of Bethlehem.*

Three shepherds are there, keeping watch over their flocks. JETHRO, *the eldest, a mild man of advanced middle age, is prone upon the grass.* REUEL, *his brother, paces restlessly back and forth.* DAVID, JETHRO'S *son, leaning on a shepherd's staff, gazes out to the horizon. A shepherd's pipe is slung from his neck.* DAVID *has the soul of a mystic and reminds one a little of the shepherd-king whose name he bears. Instinctively the older men yield him a certain deference.*

DAVID (*Pointing here and there*)

Look! Four caravans in sight at once . . .
And yet another . . . yonder cloud of dust,
Hard by the Mount of Olives . . . maketh five!
What crowds are thronging unto Bethlehem
For the enrolment!

REUEL:

Yea; a sorry sight! . . .
Nigh on a thousand souls have passed this day.
A woeful sight!

DAVID:

But wherefore woeful? . . .
See! There seemeth no end. It stirreth me;
All the unwonted movement, sounds and sights,
The asses nodding meekly 'neath the load,
Camels with swaying necks and velvet eyes,
Caravan pressing on caravan,
As though a world brought homage to a king.

REUEL (*Bitterly*)

Verily, thus it is . . . thus it is.
Yea; to the grisly king, enthroned afar,
Who hath his yoke upon the necks of men.
'T is past endurance.

JETHRO (*Resignedly*)

Yet must be endured
Spite of our heaviness. What wouldest thou?
'T is all in vain to kick against the goad . . .
(*He sadly shakes his head over it*)
Aye; many dolesome things must be endured.
The hand of God is heavy on His people.

REUEL:

The hand of God!

JETHRO:

Truly; the hand of God.
The earth is God's, and all the fullness thereof.

REUEL:

Then wherefore the Cæsar? 'T is he grindeth us down.

JETHRO:

Even a Cæsar reigneth under God,
The scourge of God, because of Israel's sin.
Holdeth his throne only at God's assent . . .
What is man that he should say to God:
What doest Thou? . . . Our fathers ate sour grapes;
So must the children's teeth be set on edge.
(*But there is little of the submissive spirit in* REUEL)

REUEL (*Darkly*)

Yet may the children gnash their teeth on Rome,
And hurl at Cæsar their anathemas.
Cursèd be Cæsar for his haughty eyes,
His arrogance . . . a thing the Lord doth hate,
Yea, an abomination unto Him! . . .
Calleth himself the lord of all the world! . . .

Let all my world be numbered, Cæsar saith.
His world, forsooth! O God of Abraham!
And, at his bidding, all a world must move,
Each man in homage to his proper place. . . .
'T is bitter shame this homage that they bring
To Cæsar.

JETHRO (*Sadly*)
Verily; 't is bitter shame.
Ichabod! How is the glory gone
From Israel!

DAVID:
But it shall return?
Is it not written that it shall return?

JETHRO:
Truly, it shall return; but not for us . . .
Not in our day. It were too much to hope.
Nay; we must needs humble ourselves to Rome,
Under the terror of his myrmidons,
And yield our tribute at the Cæsar's word.

REUEL:
The firstling lambs . . . all that should go to God!
Where is God, that He doth suffer it?

JETHRO:
Hush!

REUEL:
Nay; I echo but what others speak.
Have heard them clamor in the market-place
And on the streets. The time is ripe for deeds.
The Patriots are inflamed; the Zealots rage. . . .

JETHRO (*Mildly*)
And what availeth all the sound and fury?
Words, idle words! . . .
Ah! 't is a weary land,
A land of darkness and the mist of death,
A weary, jaded land.

REUEL:

And shall it remain
A weary, jaded land? . . .
O God, how long
Wilt thou let Roman eagles cleave the air,
And keep thy Chosen People in the dust? . . .
'T is but a leader that we need.

JETHRO (*In obvious disquiet*)

And he
Would lead but to another tragedy.
It is an ancient tale, a bloody tale.
Hast thou not heard of Jason: how he sought
To throw from off our necks the foreign yoke?
And, after him, the Maccabees? And then . . .
Thou hast forgotten Aristobulus
Who fronted Pompey . . . Nay; wert but a babe,
And cursèd with no vision of that day:
The swooning horror, bloodshed, sacrilege;
Twelve thousand dead within Jerusalem;
The desolation in the Holy Place.
(*He covers his eyes a moment with his hand*)
Never shall I forget the sights I saw . . .
'T is better far to bow beneath the yoke.

DAVID (*Who has been deeply pondering*)

But, father, thou hast called Cæsar, e'en now,
A scourge of God upon this evil land.
What if that leader come to Israel,
Whom all the world awaits . . . the Sent of God?
Not to resist the scourge, as Jason did
And Aristobulus . . . it were in vain . . .
But to banish from the heart the need of it,
O'ercome the sin . . .

JETHRO:

Then would the scourge be held.
The Lord hath sworn it by His holiness.

REUEL:

The boy hath wisdom.

JETHRO:

Aye; hearken to him.

DAVID:

Was 't not of such an One the prophets spake?
He shall be born to reign from sea to sea,
And from the River to the ends of earth,
And bring to naught the towering pomp of Rome.

REUEL:

Yea, verily.

JETHRO:

We all do look for Him.

DAVID:

And whence His power? . . . Not out of armèd hosts,
Not out of earthly splendor, rank or birth;
But out of a throbbing heart of God-like love
Toward humankind. Is it not written so?
He shall redeem the needy and the poor;
He shall befriend the destitute of earth;
And shed His light and healing over men.

REUEL:

Yea; thus it was foretold. We wait for Him;
And, waiting so long, haply we do forget . . .
God pity the folly of our little faith!

JETHRO:

God speed the coming of our promised King,
And dawn of greater days for Israel!

DAVID (*With a curious assurance*)

The King is nigh. 'T is borne upon my heart . . .
I know not how, yet know the King is nigh,
A King whose very throne is gentleness.

JETHRO:

My son, the word of God upon thy lips
Waketh within the heart its sleeping hope.

DAVID:

A voice crieth in the wilderness:
Prepare the way of the Lord, for, lo, He cometh;
Make straight in the desert a highway for our God.
(*Suddenly* DAVID *breaks off, pointing*)
But see! A caravan hath come to rest;
And they approach, who would have speech with us.
(JETHRO *at once rises. Enter* SALOME *and* ZEBEDEE. ZEBEDEE *raises a hand in greeting. The shepherds make obeisance after the Eastern fashion*)

ZEBEDEE:

Greeting, O shepherds. May God prosper you.

JETHRO:

The Lord lift up His countenance on you.

REUEL:

And give you peace.

ZEBEDEE:

Are ye of Bethlehem?

JETHRO:

We guard the Paschal lambs for Bethlehem.

SALOME:

Then are ye blest of God in this your trust.

ZEBEDEE:

And is the town at hand?

JETHRO (*Pointing*)

'T is but a league.
Shalt see the village, nestling 'mid the hills,
From yonder little rise.

ZEBEDEE:

Now, God be praised!

SALOME (*Looking anxiously over to the caravan*)

And they may rest themselves a breathing-space
Ere we press forward.

JETHRO:

Have ye traveled far?

ZEBEDEE:

We must have come nigh on a hundred miles,
All the rugged way from Nazareth,
Obedient to this latest word from Rome.

JETHRO:

Ye must be weary.

ZEBEDEE:

Aye; weary enough.

SALOME:

And there is one . . . hath bitter need of rest
And shelter, for 't is hard upon her time . . .
My sister . . .

JETHRO:

God be gracious unto her.

SALOME (*Anxiously*)

Tell us: is there in Bethlehem an inn?
Think ye there may be room?

REUEL (*Shaking his head*)

There 's little hope.

JETHRO:

Alas! The town is long since over-thronged.
Thousands are gathered unto Bethlehem . . .

SALOME (*Sadly*)

Poor Mary! Seemeth, 't will go hard with her.

ZEBEDEE:

Oh, cursèd be the Cæsar, who hath haled her
All this toilsome way! And she so feeble!

REUEL:

Aye; he hath an impious habitude.

ZEBEDEE (*Yet more furiously*)

Cursèd the man who forceth such an one
To cross the whole pitiless wilderness
To Bethlehem here . . . be jostled in the throng,
And, haply, find no place to lay her head.
Aye; cursèd be the Cæsar!

DAVID:

Yet some one,
For love of God, surely might yield his place.

SALOME:

And Mary . . . hast thou then forgotten it? . . .
Would fain the little one might see the light
In this same Bethlehem.

ZEBEDEE (*Nodding gravely*)

I had forgot,
Bethlehem! 'T is David's royal town.
Aye; it were seemly that it should be so,
When heralds of God . . .

SALOME (*Interrupting*)

Hush! These mysteries
Should not be lightly noised abroad.

ZEBEDEE (*Stoutly*)

Why not?
These are no scoffers at the things of God,
No hirelings of a Roman Emperor,
But shepherds of the Paschal lambs.

SALOME (*Nodding*)

'T is true.

ZEBEDEE:

And what do they signify, these Paschal lambs?
Tell me that.

SALOME:

Why! They do signify
Our God's deliverance of Israel
Out of the land of Egypt, out of the house
Of bondage.

ZEBEDEE (*Triumphantly*)

Yea; and this new deliverance
That God is bringing. Who more fit to hear
The wondrous thing we ponder in our hearts?

SALOME:

Haply 't is God biddeth thee speak of it.

ZEBEDEE:

The keepers of the lambs are men of faith,
Holy men, who never would profane
The mysteries. . . . Is it not so?

JETHRO (*In some bewilderment*)

Truly
We humbly worship God of Israel,
And yearn for rightful kingship, as the earth
Yearneth for healing floods . . . But what is this?
What meanest thou?

ZEBEDEE (*Impressively*)

Strange things are nigh at hand.
Hearken to me; there 's one traveleth there,
Joseph his name, Joseph the son of David,
An humble carpenter of Nazareth,
Yet truly of the lineage of kings.

SALOME:

But for the Cæsar, might be on the throne,
The rightful ruler over Israel.

REUEL:

One of the House of David, did ye say? . . .
That grave-eyed soul, who leadeth the beast?

SALOME:

'T is he.

JETHRO:

Would God, indeed, that he were on his throne!
But Cæsar ruleth. Great is the might of Cæsar.
How shall one brave that might?

ZEBEDEE (*Somewhat impatiently*)

I cannot tell.
'T is all too deep for me. . . . But this I know:
He hath been promised a son, who shall be king.
An angel appeareth to Mary, Joseph's spouse. . . .

JETHRO:

An angel!

ZEBEDEE:

Aye; to Mary in Nazareth.
And she was greatly troubled; and he said:
"Mary" . . . calling her by name . . . "fear not,
For God . . ."
(*Seeking the exact words, he appeals to* SALOME)
What was 't the angel said?

SALOME:

"Fear not,
For thou hast found high favor with thy God;
And thou shalt bear a son, who shall be called
The Son of the Most High. And God shall give
The throne of father David unto him."

ZEBEDEE:

Yea; thus it was.

DAVID:

The Son of the Most High!

JETHRO:

It passeth understanding. This, thou sayest,
Shall come to pass . . . here . . . in Bethlehem?
(ZEBEDEE *gravely nods in affirmation*)

REUEL:

The throne of David!

SALOME:

Thus the angel spake.
(DAVID *gazes over to the caravan in deep awe*)

JETHRO (*Fervently*)

If God bringeth His people forth anew,
Out of the house of bondage, into the light,
Then are our lambs the Paschal lambs indeed.
God that it might be true!

ZEBEDEE (*Gruffly*)

Thou dost not doubt! . . .

JETHRO (*Hastily*)

Nay, nay; God forbid!

REUEL:

We do not doubt . . .

JETHRO:

Only, we be rough untutored men,
And thou hast spoken marvels hard to bear.
Such tiding cometh so strangely on the heart,
The heart lacketh wherewith to welcome it.

SALOME:

I know. 'T was long ere we ourselves believed.

JETHRO:

But may the God of Abram, Isaac, Jacob, come
In bounteous compassion, and shed forth
His blessing on this mother and her babe.
And may the dayspring rise on Israel!

SALOME:

Amen to that.

ZEBEDEE (*Positively*)

'T was thus the angel spake;
And thus, ye may be sure, 't will come to pass. . . .
But Joseph beckoneth. We needs must go.

SALOME (*Making a deep obeisance*)

Farewell.

ZEBEDEE:

And, shepherds, God abide with you.

JETHRO:

Farewell.

REUEL:

Farewell.

(*Exeunt* ZEBEDEE *and* SALOME. *The shepherds look after them for a time in silence*)

DAVID (*Drawing a deep breath*)

Ah! did ye look on *her?*
Did ye behold Mary of Nazareth?
And did ye catch the glory on her face?

JETHRO (*Dazedly*)

An angel spake to her, the stranger said.

DAVID:

Never shall I forget her shining face,
As with an inward radiance, glorified;
Aye, she doth bear the look of one who hath,
From day to day, close colloquy with God.

REUEL:

It passeth understanding . . . David's throne!
Ah me! I would to God it might be true!

DAVID:

The mother of the King that is to be!
God, *I* believe! . . . How could one *but* believe,
When he hath seen the white dreams in her eyes,
The light of God's own presence on her face?
But, verily, a world shall live these dreams;
Nations arise, and seek unto that light.
God, I believe.

REUEL (*In wonder and awe*)

And, even as they came,
We spake together of the promised King!
'T is strange.

DAVID:

Did I not say that He was nigh?
'T was in my heart, the coming of the King . . .
And He shall still the age-long plaint of earth,
And bring God's peace upon this troubled land,
And dry a nation's tears . . .

REUEL (*Wistfully*)

If it be true.

DAVID:

It *must* be true. . . . Can ye not yet believe? . . .
Ah me! If ye had seen the light of God
Upon the face of Mary of Nazareth,
Ye could not but believe, as I believe.

JETHRO (*Gazing upward, with hands upraised in fervent appeal*)

O God of truth, help thou our unbelief.

CURTAIN

Scene 2

TIME: *Toward midnight.*

SCENE: *The same.*

The three shepherds are still with their flocks. A subdued light is over all. Occasionally there is the tinkle of a sheep-bell. A great star shines overhead.

DAVID:

Look to the skies above. A star is there
We never saw before. Is it not so?

JETHRO:

'T is so.

REUEL:

Dost think it heraldeth the King?

DAVID:

And all the stars glow with a softer fire,
As though in wonder . . . worship . . .
Hush!

REUEL:

What is 't?

JETHRO:

'T is but a drowsy tinkle from the sheep.

DAVID:

A tinkle? . . . Nay; 't was different . . . and strange . . .
None harpeth on the plains of Bethlehem,
And yet . . . it seemed as though one touched a harp.

JETHRO:

'T was but the leader's bell.

DAVID (*Only half persuaded*)

I do not know . . .
I may have been at fault . . .

REUEL:

No one is here.

DAVID:

Sometimes the tinkling sheep-bell taketh me,
As in a dream, to Zion. And I hear

The silver bells upon the high priest's robe
Striking the pomegranates. And all is still.
The people bow their faces to the ground;
And incense lifteth sweetly up to God.

JETHRO:

Thou hast a pleasing fantasy, my son.

DAVID:

But dost not sometimes feel that God is here,
The while we watch our starry vigils through,
As truly on the plains of Bethlehem
As in the Temple? This the House of God,
And this none other than the gate of heaven?

REUEL:

Verily.

DAVID:

And all the air is full of praise,
Under the brooding wings of peace?
Hearken! . . .
Trembling, out of the past, they come again,
The Psalms that lifted unto David's lips,
Here . . . here upon the plains of Bethlehem,
In dewy night and stillness, when he walked
With God, and dared to tell Him all his heart.
I love to dream it is the hand of God
Sweepeth my spirit, as it were a harp,
Stirreth again the songs that David sang,
First of the Bethlehem shepherds long ago,
Singing in the daring of his love:
"Bow down and hear me, O my God,
For I am poor and needy. Yet the Lord
Thinketh on me . . ."
(*He breaks off, listening intently*)

JETHRO (*Uneasily*)

No shadow moveth. We are all alone.

DAVID:

Something is sweetly borne upon the air.
Methought I heard . . .

REUEL:

What was it?

DAVID:

Far away,
As in the olive-grove, a singing voice,
Answering David's psalm . . . a singing voice . . .

JETHRO:

Only the night wind stirreth on the plain.

DAVID:

Canst hear naught else . . . now?

REUEL:

Nay; 't is a stilly night . . .
Save only . . .

DAVID:

Only what?

REUEL:

I cannot tell . . .
Haply a deep-drawn murmur, as . . .

DAVID:

I know;
As 't were a marching in the mulberry-trees . . .
The messengers of God, His angel hosts,
Unseen, alert, above us and around.

REUEL:

I did hear something.

JETHRO:

'T is a holy hour;
And the marvels we have heard, abide with us.
(*All are silent, tense, listening*)

DAVID:

Was that a footfall?

JETHRO:

Nay; mine ears are dull.

DAVID:

For love of God, I pray thee, who art thou
There in the stillness? . . .

JETHRO (*With growing uneasiness*)

There is none but God.

DAVID:

But look! . . . The sleeping lambs, our Paschal lambs,
Have waked in awe, and stare with startled eyes.
The very brooks would seem to stay their song.
The winds are hushed. The whole world is awake,
And pulsing with a new expectancy.

REUEL:

Thou seest portents.

JETHRO:

Dear lad, say on, say on;
For, lo! thine eyes shine with the light of God.
Wert ever strangely dreamful, from thy birth.
Tell us all that He hath given thee.

DAVID:

He hath not made it plain. And yet, father . . .
Cometh an heir to David's throne, she said!
I think a world holdeth its breath.

JETHRO:

Alas!
The royal line is trodden in the dust.
When David walked with God, then God was nigh;
But that was long ago . . .

DAVID:

Yet God is here,
Even as when David reigned from Bethlehem.
The heavens are swooning with a pent-up light
And power, that at a word may flood the earth . . .
Cometh an heir! . . . Is that too hard for God?
An heir to David's throne, the angel said.
Who knoweth if His hour be come?

REUEL:

David,
Thou dost strangely stir the heart.

DAVID:

But think:
Here is the little town of Bethlehem.
"Thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be
So little among the thousands of Judea,
From thee shall He come forth, that is to be
Ruler of Israel." . . . From *Bethlehem!*

JETHRO:

Would God it might be so; but . . . 't is a dream.

DAVID:

The promise came to Mary, so 't was said;
And Mary's radiant face hath witnessed it.
Can ye not feel the breathless hope of earth? . . .
His star is risen . . . What if He come to-night?
What if He come . . .

(*A golden glow steals softly over the scene, growing ever greater and brighter.* DAVID *is stirred to an ecstasy of excitement*)

But look! . . . The light! . . . The light! . . .
The glory of God streaming out of heaven! . . .
What bodeth it? . . . The voice! . . . The mystic star! . . .
The light! . . . Is it the dawn of a new day? . . .
O God, is it the selfsame pillar of fire
That led our fathers o 'er the wilderness
To the promised land? . . .

REUEL (*In fearful accents*)

It cannot be the dawn.

JETHRO (*Mechanically*)

Nay; it is hard on midnight.

DAVID:

Yet . . . the light!

(*All have fallen upon their knees*)

REUEL:

Oh, save us!

JETHRO:

We are in the hands of God.

DAVID:

I know that One is nigh. . . . 'T is on the grass . . .
'T is in the air . . . a breath . . . the waft of wings . . .

REUEL:

I am afraid.

JETHRO:

David, is it life . . .
Or death? . . .

DAVID:

Life . . . life . . . eternal life . . .
Dawn such as the world hath never known . . .
Everywhere around, the pulse of life,
The joy of life . . . dawn out of the dark.

JETHRO (*With quivering voice*)

David, thou hast an understanding heart,
And dwellest nigher the throne of God than we.
Canst make it plain to us? . . .

(DAVID *springs to his feet, facing Bethlehem, the great glow full upon his face, his arms flung wide in a very abandon of worship*)

DAVID:

A voice crying in the deeps of me:
"Fear not. I bring you tidings of great joy.
Unto you is born this day,
In the town of Bethlehem,
A Saviour which is Christ the Lord.
Not in clouds of heaven come,
Not in glory, pomp, and power,
But a babe in swaddling-clothes,
In a manger gently laid.
This the One that was to come,
God with us, Immanuel."

(Suddenly there is a burst of music . . . Voices are singing:

"Glory to God in the highest.
Peace on earth to men of good will."

DAVID *sinks to his knees again, with bowed head. All remain in worship for several moments after the last strain of music has ebbed to silence. Slowly the light dies away.* DAVID *is the first to rise; and he stands, boyishly knuckling his eyes, as though dazed with overmuch sunshine.* JETHRO *and* REUEL *rise, and stare on one another in faltering wonder*)

JETHRO (*Reverently*)
Whence came that wondrous ecstasy of praise?
Hath it been granted us . . .

REUEL:
We are awake.
We all have heard. It could not be a dream.

DAVID:
A dream! . . . 'T is the discovery of heaven,
God's spirit breaking through the mists of time,
The burden of the music of God's heart.

REUEL:
It passeth human ken . . .

DAVID:
Hearken to me:
The thing is come to pass . . . The King is born.

REUEL:
The King! . . . For whom we hoped so long in vain!

DAVID:
In vain! Didst say; in vain? . . . Nay; God be praised!
The dayspring from on high hath come to us,
To guide our feet into the way of peace.

JETHRO (*Humbly*)
But why to us, the least of all mankind? . . .

DAVID:

The dayspring from on high hath come to us;
Because of the tender mercy of our God.
Unto us a child is born,
Unto us a son is given,
God with us, Immanuel . . .
Oh, we lift our hearts to thee
For the glory in the air,
For the rapture in the skies,
For the wonder of the song,
Sweeping from about thy throne
On the waft of angel wings,
For the meaning of the song,
One day all the earth shall sing,
God with us, Immanuel . . .

JETHRO:

What shall we do?

REUEL:

Aye; what is laid on us?

DAVID:

Let us hasten unto Bethlehem,
And see this marvel that is come to pass,
The which the Lord hath made known unto us.
(*They set off at once toward Bethlehem*)
Unto us a child is born,
Unto us a son is given.
(*As* DAVID *disappears from sight, his voice can still be heard*)
God with us . . . Immanuel.

CURTAIN

Scene 3

TIME: *An hour later.*

SCENE: *The courtyard of the Inn of Bethlehem.*
An inclosure with white-washed walls R and L; a gateway L, over which hangs a lantern. The stage is dimly lighted. At

the back is the low entrance to the stable. A curtain has been drawn across it. The star is directly overhead. Enter the three shepherds, slowly, and peering anxiously about them. JETHRO *bears a lamb in his arms.* REUEL *has a flask of milk.* DAVID *has nothing but his shepherd's pipe. Still, that is his most cherished possession. They draw close to the stable.*

JETHRO:

There is no one here.

REUEL (*Disappointedly*)

No hint of stir . . .

JETHRO:

And 't were not seemly to arouse the inn.

REUEL:

Nay; it is far from dawn.

JETHRO:

Needs must we wait.

DAVID:

Yet were we urged straightway to hasten forth,
And come to Bethlehem.

REUEL:

So have we come.
But all seemeth different in these haunts of men,
As though . . . what shall I say? . . . we had awaked
Out of a wondrous dream.

DAVID (*Reproachfully*)

It was no dream.

JETHRO:

But there was nothing said about the inn.
Why should we seek Him here?

REUEL:

I cannot tell.

DAVID (*Pointing*)

I think, haply the star hath guided us.
Behold, how it hath stooped down out of heaven,
Seemeth to rest upon the very roof.

JETHRO:

'T is true . . . The star!

REUEL:

It led us unawares.
His star! . . . In very sooth, it was no dream.

(JOSEPH *comes out of the stable, and suddenly appears before them*)

JOSEPH:

Good friends, speak softly here. A mother mild
Holdeth a new-born babe against her breast.

DAVID (*Softly*)

Glory to God!

(*The shepherds accompany* JOSEPH *as far as possible from the stable entrance, and form a startled little group R front*)

JETHRO (*Realizing the significance of* JOSEPH'S *words*)

The star *did* lead to Him.

JOSEPH:

The star!

(JETHRO *points up, and* JOSEPH *gazes on the star in awe*)

REUEL:

'T is He!

JETHRO:

Where is He that is born?
For we would look upon Him face to face,
And lay our humble offerings at His feet.

JOSEPH (*Amazed*)

But, softly! . . . What meanest thou? . . . And who are ye?
What can ye know of Him that hath been born?

JETHRO:

We are the shepherds of the Paschal lambs,
And servants of thy God . . .

REUEL:

Nay; have no fear.
We come in reverence.

JETHRO:

On Bethlehem's plains
This night, we heard of Him that was to come.
Aye; we were warned in vision from on high
That we should find Him in a manger laid,
And wrapped in swaddling clothes, the new-born King.
So have we come to worship Him.

JOSEPH:

'T is strange . . .
A vision, ye have said? . . .

REUEL:

Yea; in the night
A great light shone about us . . . Angels sang . . .

DAVID (*Rapturously breaking in*)

Glory to God in the Highest, Peace on earth! . . .
Oh, the song that swept like flame
Through the open gates of heaven!
All the music of the spheres!
Singing of the morning stars!
So the very winds were hushed;
Fleeting time had ceased to be;
While we bowed us to the earth,
Sharing God's eternity.
(*He clutches* JOSEPH'S *aba, in urgent appeal*)
Grant us here to look upon
Him whom all the heavens adore;
Bring our homage unto Him;
Learn, and live the angel song.

JOSEPH (*In awe*)

And ye have heard the herald angels, too! . . .
Aye; ye shall look on Him. Patience a moment's space.
One came to me, but none I told would hear.
And yet I *knew;* the word was in mine heart
Beyond all question: "Mary, thy wife," said he,
"Shall bear a son, and thou shalt call Him Jesus,
For He shall save His people from their sins."

JETHRO:

Blessed art thou, Joseph, thou son of David!

REUEL:

And may thy Jesus sit on David's throne,
And humble the Roman eagles in the dust.

JOSEPH (*In alarm*)

But hush! The very walls have ears.

JETHRO:

'T is true;
And one in arms approacheth to the gate.

JOSEPH:

Herod must know naught of the new-born King.

REUEL:

Haply, it is the watchman.

(*They fall to silence, till the newcomer may disclose himself. Enter a Roman soldier*)

SOLDIER:

Who are here?

JOSEPH:

A humble traveler from Nazareth.

SOLDIER:

According to the edict?

JOSEPH:

Aye.

SOLDIER (*To the shepherds*)

And ye?

JETHRO:

But shepherds from the plains of Bethlehem.
We do no harm . . .

SOLDIER (*Magnanimously*)

Oh, ye have naught to fear
Of Rome . . . (*He laughs*) So that ye keep your lowly place,
Amid the dust from Cæsar's chariot wheels.

(*He draws apart, and for a few moments gazes fixedly at the star*)

Have any of you wit to read the stars?

JOSEPH:

Not I.

(*The soldier glances at* REUEL)

REUEL:

Could any simple shepherd read
The hidden mysteries?

SOLDIER:

How should I know? . . .
A shepherd! Nay; 't were hardly to be hoped,
When all the seers fail. . . . There is a star
That seemeth to outsplendor all the rest.
Have ye not seen it? . . . There, above your heads!
Doth sore disturb the augurs of the king.

JETHRO:

Aye; we have seen it.

SOLDIER:

Seemeth as if it shone
For this poor courtyard only . . . Led *me* here.
But here is naught that might enkindle stars.
(*He gazes up again, shading his eyes*)
They say it is a portent. Who can tell?
The oracles are blind; the augurs dumb.
I wonder what it meaneth. . . .
Out in the streets,
Have caught a whisper of a coming king.
Another Jewish superstition . . . Eh?
(*He continues with a certain unexpected wistfulness*)
And some one said 't will be a gentle king,
Swaying an empire with a word of love,
Shedding unwonted peace upon a world,
Heart of a god in Him . . . a gentle king.

JOSEPH:

It is an ancient prophecy.

SOLDIER (*Laughing almost ashamedly*)

Ah, well;
'T is little like fulfilment in our time.

I fancy Herod would have much to say,
And little patience with a rival king. . . .
Most likely dash the babe against the stones.
A gentle king! . . . And Herod on the throne!
(*He has another long look at the star*)
Myself am but a downright man-at-arms,
And never meddle with such matters. . . . Yet . . .
Were I a king, I think I 'd manage things
A little differently. . . . Were I a king!
(*He solemnly ponders the matter*)
In sooth, I 'd like to see a gentle king,
One who would use his might to heal and bless,
And bring a light into his people's eyes,
Whene'er they looked on him, and right their wrongs.
That would be kingly. . . . Eh?

JOSEPH:

It would be kingly.

(*The soldier laughs appreciatively over his own disquisition on kingship*)

SOLDIER:

Well, Herod could scarce be named a gentle king,
But ye have naught to fear of Herod here,
So ye do keep the peace. I go my rounds,
And leave it to wiser heads to read the stars.
(*He turns toward the gate*)

DAVID:

Soldier, I think thou art not far from God.
(*The soldier wheels abruptly at his words*)

SOLDIER:

Not far from God! . . . But thou art passing bold.
Not far . . . What meanest thou?

DAVID (*Meekly*)

I only meant
That thou mayst worship yet the coming King.

SOLDIER:

Then must your coming king be worshipful
Beyond all kings I ever knew or served.
Not far from God, thou saidst . . . Not far from God! . . .
Nay; I shall never understand you Jews.
Yet . . .

(*He ponders it deeply a moment, and decides that* DAVID'S *remark was innocent enough*)

haply 't was no affront . . .
I must away.
There 's much afoot to-night. Farewell.

ALL:

Farewell.

(*Exit the soldier. The others gather together, speaking in breathless excitement*)

JOSEPH:

I never saw that star until ye came.

JETHRO:

Aye; 't is a portent, that new star on high,
And greater than he dreameth.

REUEL:

We have seen . . .

JETHRO:

We have seen sights we never shall forget.

DAVID:

The heavens opened, and all the glory of God.

JOSEPH:

Truly, God's ways are past all searching out.

JETHRO:

We watched our flocks, and marvels came to pass.

REUEL:

I was afraid.

DAVID:

An angel seemed to speak;
Banished our fears, and bade us seek the King.

And then the glory . . . all of heaven in praise.
A world of wonder!

JETHRO:

And we came in haste,
To seek the King, the Saviour of the world.
(SALOME *appears from behind the curtain*)

SALOME:

Who are here?
(*She peers into their faces*)
The shepherds of the plains!
So ye did trust our word, and ye have come.

JETHRO:

Aye; seeking Him of whom thyself didst speak,
To whom the Lord hath given David's throne.

SALOME (*In welling happiness*)

Then let your hearts be joyful in your King,
And every living thing give praise to God.
For He is come; He lieth there within.
The King is born in royal Bethlehem.

DAVID:

And can we see Him? May we worship Him?

JETHRO:

We are but shepherds, bringing humble gifts,
Such as we have.

REUEL:

Here is a flask of milk.

JETHRO:

And here a lamb, the firstling of the flock.

JOSEPH:

'T is meet they see the babe.

SALOME:

Yea, verily.
Mary hath heard you, bade me bring you in.

JETHRO:

Speak for us, David. We be slow of tongue.
Speak for us, when we come to greet the King.

(SALOME *draws the curtain aside, disclosing the interior of the stable. The manger, which is merely a rude wooden trough, has been drawn to the center; and* MARY *hovers over it, half reclining on the straw behind. A lantern hangs overhead, but a great light seems to shine from the manger on the mother's face*)

SALOME:

Shepherds of Bethlehem, I pray you enter.

JETHRO:

Hail, Mary! Blessed above all womankind!
Immortal name! . . .

MARY (*Softly*)

Hush! Mary is of dust.
Not unto her the worship of your hearts.
She hath lived the common human life;
She hath wept the common human tears.
This alone shall ere be known of her:
God trusted her with His Immanuel.

(MARY *indicates the child in the manger.* JOSEPH, *in entering, has made his way behind, and stands at* MARY'S *shoulder.* JETHRO, *too, is beyond the manger, on the other side of* MARY, *facing out.* DAVID *kneels beside him.* SALOME *and* REUEL *kneel at the doorway, one on either side, facing in*)

JOSEPH (*Laying a hand tenderly on* MARY'S *shoulder*)

God give us strength for this our sacred trust.
He is a babe, a little helpless babe,
On whom doth rest the hope of all a world.
Circle us with thy chariots of fire;
Flood our hearts with wisdom from on high.
So shall we be thy ministers of grace.

JETHRO:

Our homage to our King.

(*He lays his lamb by the manger*)

REUEL:

Our leal love.

(*He lays his flask of milk by the manger.* DAVID *takes the shepherd's pipe from about his neck, and, reverently, makes of it his offering*)

DAVID:

Oh, Thou who art the bright and morning star,
Immortal joy, immortal light of life,
Whose tiny hand shall heal the broken heart,
And wake anew the old lost songs of earth,
Thou who hast our being in Thy breath,
Art all the loveliness in humankind,
The gentleness and strength of humankind,
O Glory of the world, we worship Thee.
Accept our hearts and lives, who worship Thee.

(*At* DAVID'S *words of adoration,* MARY *has lifted her eyes from the manger; and she is gazing far out beyond the worshipers into the starry night in solemn reverie. Already she has many things to ponder in her heart*)

MARY (*Slowly and deliberately*)

When man was driven forth from Paradise,
And God had sealed the gate with flaming sword,
'T was darksome night. . . . Yet in the night were stars,
As they were eyes of trembling wistfulness
And hopes unfathomable for the world . . .
The stars of God's great promise unto men.

(*She bends anew, almost fearfully, over the manger*)

Ah, Jesus, all the stars have led to Thee . . .

(MARY'S *voice falters*)

What is at hand? What shall it mean to Thee?
Dear babe within the lowly manger laid,
Am but Thy mother . . . haply Thou 'lt understand . . .
I almost would Thou wert . . . naught but my babe,

With never a world to come and worship Thee.
Fain would I clasp Thee closely to my breast,
Yield Thee no other throne . . .

(*She passes a hand wearily across her eyes, and with an effort controls herself*)

Nay; God forgive!
'T was but the weakness of the flesh that spake.

(*Bravely she lifts her face, and raises her hands on high. And her voice rings out in the words of the great Temple hymn in thrilling adoration*)

My soul doth magnify the Lord,
And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour . . .
For He that is mighty hath done great things,
And . . . holy . . . is . . . His . . . name.

(*For an appreciable time she remains, her arms uplifted, her head held high in sacred pride. She has made her renunciation for humankind. She is conscious of her infinite weariness. Slowly her arms come down over the manger, till one gently circles the child within. Slowly her head droops, till her cheek rests against the cheek of her babe. She is the very picture of yearning motherhood. The shepherds quietly and reverently depart.* SALOME *draws the curtains upon the stable from within*)

CURTAIN

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